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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

JANUARY 2005

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

JANUARY 2005

No. 1



Traditional Wisdom



MIND CONTROL

सङ्कल्पप्रभवान्कामास्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः ।
मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥
शनैः शनैरुपरमेद्बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।
आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥
यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।
ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥

Giving up all desires born of the will, withdrawing the senses from every direction by strength of mind, attain tranquillity little by little with the help of the buddhi armed with fortitude. Once the mind is established in the Atman, one should not think of anything else. Whenever the fickle and unquiet mind strays, withdraw it and restore it to the control of the Atman alone. (*Bhagavadgita*, 6.24-6)

One cannot see God without purity of heart. Through attachment to 'woman and gold' the mind has become stained—covered with dirt, as it were. A magnet cannot attract a needle if the needle is covered with mud. Wash away the mud and the magnet will draw it. Likewise, the dirt of the mind can be washed away with the tears of our eyes. This stain is removed if one sheds tears of repentance and says, 'O God, I shall never again do such a thing.' Thereupon God, who is like the magnet, draws to Himself the mind, which is like the needle. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 173-4)

Where is God? He is where the world is not. If you wish to go to God, you must turn your back on the world. The senses must be controlled and turned in the opposite direction. God is seated in the heart; so all your sense energies and mental energies must converge to that one point and take you there. But this can be done only when you realize that He is the best, the highest, in the whole universe. (Swami Ramakrishnananda)



To Our Readers



With this issue *Prabuddha Bharata* steps into its 110th year of publication. This special issue of 96 pages is a collection of articles on varied themes.

Started by Swami Vivekananda, this organ of the Ramakrishna Order has before it the task of dissemination of man-making Vedantic truths as lived and taught by Sri Ra-

makrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji.

On this occasion we are happy to send our New Year greetings and best wishes to all our readers, contributors, advertisers, friends and well-wishers. May we request them to enrol their friends as subscribers to this journal.

∞ This Month ∞

Where the Heart Is, this month's editorial, is an attempt to briefly capture the glory of the divine Light, which embodied for the welfare of humanity as Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features some clippings from 'Occasional Notes' and 'News and Miscellanies'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 1 to 20 of the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*.

Both the adorable divine aspect and the endearing human aspect were intertwined in Swami Vivekananda's personality. In **Vivekananda the Man—Swamiji's Humanity** Sri C S Ramakrishnan depicts the second aspect, detailing the unique relationship between Swamiji and his guru Sri Ramakrishna; Swamiji's love for his mother, brother disciples, disciples and his pets; and his wit and humour. A former editor of *Vedanta Kesari*, the author has been associated for decades with Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

In **Vedanta Is an Investigative Science, Not a Closed System** Swami Mukhyanandaji presents an integral view of Vedanta and

distinguishes between opinion- and investigation-based knowledge. He argues that science need not look down upon Vedanta since the latter is as scientific as the former, if not more, with its own methodology for investigation of truth; in fact, they form two aspects of man's total knowledge. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Belur Math, the author is a deep thinker and has many books and papers to his credit.

In **Manifestations of the Goddess** Dr Alan Hunter reviews various beliefs in goddesses in ancient and recent cultures and analyses the deification of Sri Sarada Devi as a goddess. The author is a senior lecturer in peace and reconciliation studies at Coventry University, UK. He visits India and China frequently.

India's Rejuvenation: Swami Vivekananda's Vision is the text of Swami Atmapriyanandaji's paper presented at a symposium organized on this theme by Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai, on 23 December 2001. In India the thrust has mainly been on mental and spiritual rejuvenation. The author underlines in this learned paper the need for more of physical (scientific) rejuvenation in the light of Swamiji's thoughts. Fa-

miliar to our readers, the author is principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur.

Holy Mother is the embodiment of the overarching feminine ideal and an eternal beacon light for all women. A personification of purity, she was a primary receptacle for the divine Shakti. Prof Amalendu Chakraborty admirably portrays these various facets of Mother's life in **An Embodiment of Universal Motherhood**, and underlines the indubitable fact that, more than anything else, she is the mother of all. A former head of the department of philosophy of Presidency College, Kolkata, the author is one of our regular contributors.

The restored and renovated ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda in Kolkata is a new branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, housing two complexes: a memorial at Swamiji's place of birth and a Cultural Centre comprising three wings: Vivekananda Research Centre, Textbook Library and Seminar Hall, and Rural and Slum Development Centre. His Excellency Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, inaugurated the Cultural Centre on 1 October 2004. **Awakening of India** is the text of his inaugural address.

It is easy to cull passages from Swami Vivekananda's teachings to suit one's agenda, but it is ludicrous to try to contain Swamiji within the pale of politics, says Swami Sandarshanandaji in his learned article **Politics, Religion and Vivekananda**. The author analyses the ills plaguing our society and discusses remedies in the light of Swamiji's message of timeless relevance. One of our regular contributors, the swami is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar.

The Vedas are called 'shruti', meaning that they have been heard—by a succession of disciples from their gurus. Swami Tatha-

gatanandaji captures this ancient, Indian method of imparting knowledge in his analytical article **A Brief Introduction to India's Sacred Oral Tradition**. The author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and heads the Vedanta Society of New York.

Towards Enlightened Citizenship is an analysis by Swami Satyamayanandaji of the mutual interaction and influence of individual and social forces, and the interrelationship between individuals. Enlightened citizenship, the author argues, consists in looking upon others and interacting with them on the broader canvas of humanity and, as one's perception gets refined, looking upon everyone as the Atman, the divinity that pervades our body and mind. The swami is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Holy Mother was a mother, wife and nun in one. In **A Wonder Triangle** Sri N Hariharan analyses the strange coexistence of the three aspects in her, who was an embodiment of purity (*pavitratā-svarūpiṇī*). The author is a postgraduate in economics and is closely associated with Ramakrishna Math, Madurai.

Swami Vivekananda's First Hosts in Bombay: Ramdas Chabildas and Chabildas Lalubhai is Swami Shuddharupanandaji's painstaking research work on the lives of the son and father who played host to Swamiji. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from its Jaipur branch.

Implications of the First Three Meetings between Sri Ramakrishna and M by Dr C S Shah brings out the essence of the Master's teachings for householders. Deceased a few months back, the author was a medical consultant from Aurangabad and regularly wrote for this journal and *Vedanta Kesari*.

Where the Heart Is

EDITORIAL

‘Anyone who has sincerely called upon God even once must come here,’ Sri Ramakrishna announced one day at Dakshineswar with the assurance of a piper confident of the musical web that his magical flute can weave. And if Sri Krishna’s legendary flute continues to bewitch men and women to this day as it did in the ancient groves of Vrindaban, the charm of Sri Ramakrishna’s words have proved no less mesmerizing. The immense popularity of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) bears ample testimony to this fact.

For the earnest spiritual aspirant seeking a sense of direction in the vast expanse of the spiritual realm, Sri Ramakrishna’s words come as a whiff of fresh air. The profundity and subtlety of the spiritual world, as also its radiance, is laid open to access by Sri Ramakrishna through his simple Bengali patois—colloquial, yet so expressive. In his discourse, complex philosophical problems, existential paradoxes and ethical dilemmas are all resolved through illuminating metaphors and apt similes. For instance, he tells us that in the wall that stands barring our vision of the transcendent the avatara is the metaphorical ‘hole’. It is only through this ‘hole’ that we can realistically visualize the divine play of the Spirit. Again, when we find him talking to the Divine Mother in a way as natural as any of our across-the-table talks, we are keen to know what we need to do to participate in those conversations. Pat comes the reply, ‘Have intense longing for God’, and this aspiration is then likened to the disciple’s gasping for breath on being forcibly dunked in a pond by a guru keen on driving home his point.

With a felicitous turn of phrase or ingenious coinage of compounds pregnant with

meaning, Sri Ramakrishna provides striking insights into human nature as well as timeless spiritual verities. ‘*Gita* repeated ten times over reveals its essence: *t(y)agi*, the renunciant.’ This is one example of Sri Ramakrishna’s delightful play upon words. However, the levels of meaning and the philosophical implications enfolded in this simple sentence are truly manifold. Issues of study, of repetitive japa and its potentials, of meanings and essentials are all involved therein, as are grammatical nuances. ‘*Kamini-kanchana*’, ‘lust and lucre’ or, literally, ‘woman and gold’, is a recurrent expression in Sri Ramakrishna’s narrative. It has remained a highly debated term (especially in the translation), a fact that testifies to the truth of Sri Ramakrishna’s assertion that *kamini-kanchana* alone is *maya*. Then there are expressions like ‘*Yato mat tato path*; As many faiths so many paths’ and ‘*Shiva jnane jiva-seva*; Service to man as Shiva’, that have attained aphoristic status in spiritual discourse.

Parables, the hallmark of prophets, constitute a literary genre that is considered particularly difficult to construct. Sri Ramakrishna is a master of the parable. Folk wisdom, Puranic legends, personal anecdotes and everyday events—he weaves them all together into a rich narrative, at once enlightening and entertaining.

His room at Dakshineswar is a veritable ‘mart of joy’. Singing, dancing and spiritual talk alternate in never-ending succession. Divine inspiration is in the very air. Sri Ramakrishna dislikes long faces. His witticisms set his disciples rolling with side-splitting laughter.

In sum, his magnetism is irresistible. Young or old, man or woman, lettered or otherwise, one is simply left spellbound once within Sri Ramakrishna’s magic circle.

Yet Sri Ramakrishna is a hard taskmaster. He is the proverbial money changer who would carefully test all his coins. Counterfeits simply cannot pass muster. If you are not a genuine aspirant you can't enter the magic circle; and very few seem to enjoy that privilege. Nor can you be complacent once you are granted entry. If you are invited by him to stay overnight at Dakshineswar you are sure to be roused in the middle of your sleep and instructed to meditate; and during the day you have only to take a false step to be rapped on your knuckles by the ever-watchful Master. Worse still, he could leave you to fend for yourself if your 'unripe I' becomes too assertive. Spiritual life can then appear hard and thankless.

Again, the splendour of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual achievements can blind us to their incredible immensity. A revered monk of the Ramakrishna Order once pointed out that the representation of Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi in the *Kathamrita* has proved highly misleading; not because the portrayal is not veridical, but the ease with which Sri Ramakrishna enters into deep samadhi and emerges therefrom with wonderful insights obscures the rarity of samadhi (of a high order) as a phenomenon.

* * *

Sri Ramakrishna is the mythical piper, but when Narendra sings he is himself transported into ecstasy, his physical form left transfixed in samadhi. Evidently, Narendra can hypnotize even the magician. Small wonder then that men and women from all sections of society should be captivated by the magnetism of his personality and the power of his message when he eventually burst forth on the global scene as Swami Vivekananda. His message to the West and his plan of action for India have proved to be perennial in their inspiration. For the youth of India Swamiji is an ideal to be looked up to, if difficult to emulate. His multifaceted personality and many-sided

genius make him easy to identify with. If you are keen on football, Swamiji will tell you that it is probably better for you than poring over the *Gita*. You need not be a linguist to be fascinated by the charm and power of his language, both English and Bengali—'phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythm like the march of Handel choruses'. For the musician, singer or artist, Swamiji is a veritable muse (genders, of course, are not relevant here), and for those seeking a philosophy to live by Swamiji offers a religion that is 'simple, popular, and at the same time meets the requirements of the highest minds'. If his exhortatory march from Colombo to Almora was electrifying in its effect, the record of these Indian speeches continues to enthuse Indian youth with the spirit of renunciation and service.

It is difficult to hear Swamiji's call and not respond. One cannot help but identify with his great passion for the uplift of the masses and service of the poor and afflicted. If Swamiji's heart wept for the masses we surely cannot let those teardrops go in vain.

Yet, can we really measure up to this call? Do we have the muscles of iron, the nerves of steel, and the heart akin to the thunderbolt that Swamiji demands of us in order to accomplish his Herculean mission? Do we possess that purity, patience and perseverance necessary to succeed against overwhelming odds? Do we have hearts that can feel, minds that can think pragmatically and hands that can execute plans?

* * *

A non-descript rickshaw-puller walked into the bookstall of a Ramakrishna Mission institution and asked for a freshly released, bulky Bengali volume on Sri Sarada Devi (*Shatarupe Sarada*). He was rather downcast to learn that the book was priced much higher than the amount that he had with him, that being all of his day's earnings. The monk in charge of the stall turned curious and inquired what he wished to do with the book

and if he could at all read the book. The rickshaw-puller's reply was revealing. He had seen a copy of the book with one of his passengers. The face on the cover had reminded him of his own mother. He could not read, but his son could, and he would read out to him about Mother.

Equally fascinating is Murugan's story that has received some publicity recently (see *Vedanta Kesari*, April 2004, 32-4). Convicted of murder at the young age of seventeen and serving a life sentence along with his father and brother, he was driven to despair over the sufferings of his mother and sisters. He was contemplating suicide when he was given a book on the life and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi by a fellow inmate. He browsed through a few pages rather disinterestedly when his attention was drawn to the following words of Holy Mother: 'Do not be afraid. Human birth is full of suffering. Hold on to the name of God and wade through the sufferings. Even the gods, holy men, avatars and saints will have to go through suffering if they take human birth. They have to go through physical and mental tortures for others, to absolve others of their sins.'

Reading this passage over and over again Murugan realized the insignificance of his sufferings in comparison with those of many other people, even those who were great and saintly. In his own words, 'I felt as though a burden was lifted from me, a feeling of lightness spread within me, and I felt that Mother herself had consoled me. I gave up the idea of suicide that very night. I started confronting my suffering and depression face to face, and started chanting the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Slowly I felt a sense of peace engulfing me; I

felt Mother's grace and blessings surrounding me'. By his own admission, Murugan is now a transformed man. Mother's message has taught him to open up his heart in prayer and thus attain peace of mind and clarity of thought. To put Mother's personal example of service into practice he now takes classes on the *Bhagavadgita*, *Thiruvvasagam* (a Tamil scriptural text), and the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji for his fellow inmates who look upon him as a venerable teacher helping them out of their own agony and suffering. Mother's call to avoid looking at others' faults and to 'make the whole world one's own' has induced an attitudinal change that has brought him closer to many of the other inmates.

These anecdotes will not appear out of the ordinary to those familiar with the life of Holy Mother, although they are relatively recent events. But they do carry a strong message of hope. Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual brilliance can dazzle us into blindness and sap our intrepidity (Arjuna's condition in Chapter 11 of the *Gita* may be recalled for—a rather unequal—comparison). On the other hand, we can hardly match up to Swamiji's expectations. But with Mother, we can find our spiritual feet. It is in the nature of mothers to provide their children with physical and emotional support. But the Mother Divine strikes a deeper chord by awakening the spiritual heart of her children. Our rickshaw-puller would give all of his day's earnings to know about Mother, and the transformed Murugan would make any mother proud. 'To live for others,' says Murugan, 'is the Mother's heart. After all, it is the heart of the Almighty.' Mother is resident where the heart is. *

Always remember, the Lord is the doer. If ever the idea that 'I am the doer' enters into your head, the Lord instantly flies away. All efforts will then be in vain. Let not the 'unripe' ego ever enter your heart. Pray that you may only be an instrument in the hands of the Lord, through His grace. Only then will you become a real karma yogi.

—Swami Premananda

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

January 1905

To those who with us share the belief that the uplift of the masses, the arrest of social decay, and the progress of the country can be effected by the spiritual power of our Blessed Religion, the retrospect is extremely disappointing. No systematic effort has yet been made to spread the principles of the Religion Eternal to the millions of our uneducated brothers and sisters. No pure form of worship has as yet been given to them, though our sacred shastras contain the highest and best of such in the world. They are made to starve in the midst of plenty.

Social life is a school of training for men and women. Its institutions are means of raising human nature to certain standards of excellence. The societies which approximate and elevate their standards oftener than others possess the greatest amount of life and health. Those which do not [do that] but stagnate or pull down the standards to suit their ease and inclination show sure signs of degeneration and decay. The institutions of a society must always call for strenuous effort and conquest of lower nature, and should therefore be elevated whenever possible and never lowered. Do we lower our educational standards to accommodate the idleness or backwardness of our boys and girls? Why then should the more vital social standards be lowered to pander to the love of ease and pleasure of our grown-up boys and girls? We should not forget Kant's words that an ideal is 'a citizenship, which is in heaven', which the more we grow up to, we find beyond our reach, always inspiring and beckoning us to come higher.

—from 'Occasional Notes'

Free Copies of Prabuddha Bharata

A kind friend has given us one year's subscription for 50 copies of *Prabuddha Bharata*, wishing that a copy may be sent free of charge to such libraries, colleges and schools as would like to have it. The Manager will be glad to send to any such institution a copy of the paper each month from January to December 1905 on receipt of an application, countersigned by the headmaster or principal in case of schools and colleges, and by a leading citizen in case of a library.

* * *

Sandow is a mighty man of muscle, but a stronger one than he has just made his appearance in London. His name is Letti, and at a private view he performed remarkable feats of strength, despite the fact that he does not appear to be gifted with any exceptional physical capabilities. Herr Letti is only 5 ft high, weighs 10 st, is 37 years old, a miller by trade, and was born near Munich. His muscles are quite untrained, yet he lifted a huge anchor on which were four men, the whole weighing 1500 lbs. He thus beat the world's record lift of 1100 lbs by 400 lbs. Not content with this, he tried his strength against a 16 hp motorcar, to which, when the car was going at 35 miles an hour, he was attached by means of a strap. He stopped the progress of the car immediately, and pulled it back across the arena. Until six months ago Herr Letti had no idea of his strength; he was never trained, and lives like an ordinary man.

—from 'News and Miscellanies'

Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 11: The Vision of the Universal Form

In the tenth chapter Sri Krishna declared that the entire universe is ruled and supported by only a part of His power. Arjuna begs to be favoured with a vision of the way in which God supports the universe by His unsearchable power. And his prayer is granted.

Speaking from the highest standpoint, the Lord is absolute and formless. Though formless, fire seems to take a form when something is ablaze. Similarly, though formless, God appears with form to the devotee. When the mind is pure and spiritualized, the incomprehensible divine majesty of God throws, as it were, a reflection on that purified mind and *that* is the spiritual perception of man. As fire is present everywhere and can be made visible through friction, even so God is present everywhere and can be made visible through burning love and devotion.

How wonderful, beyond all comprehension, is the statement made by Sri Krishna in the last verse of Chapter 10: 'O Arjuna, what need is there for you to know all those details? I alone exist, sustaining this whole universe by a portion of Myself.' This entire universe with all its wonders, its worlds, stars, planets and solar systems is held in place and kept under control by the power of the Lord, Ishvara. And what tremendous energy to accomplish that! Words cannot describe it, the mind cannot conceive it, yet it is after all a fragment, an insignificant part of the glory and power of God. For at the back of all this power and of all manifestation remains the unexpressed Satchidananda. About That we cannot know anything. All questions regarding It can only be met with silence. The answer that we get from the Vedas regarding this absolute state is '*neti*,

neti; not this, not this'. That is all we can know about It: that It is neither this nor that. 'There the sun cannot illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the flash of lightening—what to speak of this mortal fire! All shine after Him who shines. All this is illumined by His radiance.'¹ And how can we know anything positive about It? For 'From there words reflect back with thought without reaching the goal.'² 'There the eye cannot reach, neither can speech nor the mind.'³

Arjuna has understood that this Absolute state is far beyond the reach of men or gods. No one can penetrate there and live. To *know* Brahman one has to *become* Brahman. And so Sri Krishna is leading Arjuna step by step. Keep the Highest in view, but work your way up from the bottom. Then there is no danger. Yes, I permeate all things as butter permeates milk. And as churning is necessary to produce butter and to make it visible to the eye, so is practice necessary to see Me. Therefore first try to see Me in whatever is the greatest of its kind. I am the lion among wild animals; I am Rama among warriors; I am Prahlada among Daityas. 'Whatever being there is powerful, beautiful or glorious, know that to have sprung forth from a portion of My splendour.'⁴ I will start you on the way.

And now in the eleventh chapter Arjuna says, 'Yes, I have understood. I have listened attentively and shall do as You tell me. But if I may have a glimpse of Your divine form, O Krishna, if I may once see it, if I may once witness how You dwell in these manifestations, then it will be easier afterwards to remember You always.' And that is the beginning of the eleventh chapter.

Remember, Arjuna does not ask for a vision of the Absolute. That would be impossible, but he wants to see the form of Ishvara, God the Sustainer of the universe, God immanent in nature, the Spirit, the Mother, in all things. 'Yes,' says Arjuna, 'You are the sun among heavenly bodies, but *how* are You the sun? I can say that, but what of that? I want to see You there in the sun, like the rishi of old who addressed the sun, "O Sun, they tell me to mediate on you as Ishvara. But I do not see Ishvara; I see only your burning rays. Remove those rays; gather up your burning effulgence;

remove your golden disk; that I (the seeker of Truth) may see the supreme Spirit, your very essence.'"⁵ And then the rishi saw. And so Arjuna also wants to see the Lord. And he sees and describes his vision in this chapter.

The vision spoken of here is really a revelation, a spiritual awakening. It is an internal experience; it is the Knowledge of the Great Beyond. It is the realization of God as the Soul of the universe.

The chapter opens with this request of Arjuna.

1. Arjuna said:

By the supremely profound words regarding Self-knowledge, spoken by You out of compassion for me, my delusion has been dispelled.

By Your words of wisdom (as recorded in preceding chapters), O Lord, my delusion has been dispelled. I laboured under a great miscomprehension, confounding Truth with falsehood, Reality with appear-

ance, the Eternal with the ephemeral. But Your words have showed me the path of nirvana and re-established my power of discrimination regarding the True and the false, the Self and the non-Self, Spirit and matter.

2. O Lotus-eyed (Krishna), I have heard at length from You of the origin and dissolution of beings, as well as of Your inexhaustible greatness.

In Chapters 7 to 10 Sri Krishna has told Arjuna quite explicitly about the creation and

dissolution of things and also of His infinite glory.

3. O Great Lord, as You have declared Yourself, so it is. (Still) I desire to see Your Ishvara form, O Supreme Being.

Arjuna addresses Sri Krishna here as the Great Lord. Surely whatever the Lord Himself says, must be true. Arjuna shows thereby that he has no doubt regarding the truth of what Sri Krishna taught. He does not test the authority of Sri Krishna. But for the

satisfaction of his own spiritual aspiration he wishes to see His Universal Form. Arjuna does not ask to see any of God's inferior forms, but His Ishvara form, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, possessed of infinite wisdom, strength, virtue and splendour.

4. O Lord, if You think I am capable of seeing it, then, O Lord of yogis, show me Your immutable Self.

O Lord, One who receives my prayer, in whom I put all my trust, show me Your immutable Self. I am very anxious to behold it. But I do not know whether I am worthy. If I am fit for that great favour, then may it be granted to me. Thou art the

Lord of yogis. If ordinary yogis can exercise superhuman powers, then who can tell the extent of Your powers, for all other powers are but reflections of Yours?

And then, thus implored by Arjuna,

5. The Blessed Lord said:

Behold, O son of Pritha, by hundreds and thousands My various celestial forms of different colours and shapes.

6. Behold the Adityas, the Rudras, the Vasus, the twin Ashvins and the Maruts. Behold, O descendant of Bharata, many wonders that were not seen before.

7. O Gudakesha, behold in this body of mine the entire universe together with all the moving (creatures) and the unmoving (objects) and whatever else you desire to perceive.

Sri Krishna is pleased with Arjuna. His humility and sincere desire to know the Truth have awakened this response in Sri Krishna's heart. 'Yes, I will show you My divine nature. All the hundreds and thousands of forms, mundane and celestial, you will see established as a whole in My Universal Form. You will see what no human being has ever

witnessed before. The entire universe with all its creatures you will see as part of My body. And whatever else you may like to see, you will see all that now. You will see the past, the present and the future. Your anxiety regarding the outcome of the battle will be removed and many other things will be revealed to you.'

8. But you cannot see Me with these eyes of yours. Therefore I give you divine Sight. Behold My supreme yoga power!

You asked Me, whether I thought you fit to see My divine form. No, Arjuna, no human being has ever beheld My Universal Form. Neither would you be able to see it with your human eyes. You have seen My manifestations in life, but today you will touch the very substance of My Being. For that I have to give you supersensuous sight. I can do that through My yoga power. I alone can give that realization to man, that spiritual illumination which brings moksha. It is a power that belongs to Me as Ishvara, and when I incarnate for the well-being of mankind, I carry that power with Me.' The Incarnations alone can give man that divine insight. They can say with Jesus, 'All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *Him*.'⁶ Unto them is given all power in heaven and on earth!

That spiritual vision comes with the opening of the third eye, the spiritual eye, located between the eyebrows, which is closed in ordinary people. When that eye opens, the field of man's consciousness changes. It is shifted and enlarged, bringing with it divine perception.

One becomes a seer, a rishi, or a prophet.

Sri Ramakrishna had the power to awaken spiritual power in man. By a touch He could bestow the state of samadhi on devotees. The scales would drop from their eyes and they would look into Eternity; they would behold Truth face to face. Sometimes it has been said that this is simply hypnotism. No. Hypnotism means replacing one set of ideas by another present in the mind of the person who hypnotizes. But that is not what happens here. In this case, while quite conscious of what takes place in him, the devotee sees the darkness of ignorance, which ruled in his mind, dispelled by the light of Wisdom. As the mist clears when the sun rises, so layer after layer of darkness disappears and Truth begins to shine from within. The cataract is lifted. True and full vision, man's inborn sight, is established. Then, and not until then, does man come to his own. He sees clearly and is free from delusion. He is himself. He is dehypnotized. He is freed from the hypnotic influence the world had thrown over him. That can be brought about only by the divine Teacher.

But how do we know that the guru does not simply hypnotize the disciple? It was

proved in Sri Ramakrishna's case. Once it happened that Sri Ramakrishna was coming out of the state of samadhi and in his ecstatic joy touched some of the devotees around him. Immediately, they all had divine visions. In their joy they called others, and Sri Ramakrishna touched everyone who came to him. There was a large number of them, for people came from different directions to witness the miracle and to be themselves blessed with the divine touch. They all became illumined at that moment, but the vision was different with each one of them. Each had a different experience and realization. Some saw their *ishtadevata*: they saw the Lord in the form in which they worshipped Him. One saw Krishna, another Buddha, and another the Divine Mother. Others saw the universe as a dream: the gross manifestation vanished and only the universe of ideas remained. Each one realized *his own ideal*. Had it been a case of hypnotizing people in a room (as some yogis do) all would have had the same experience, the same vision. But that was not the case. Neither did Sri Ramakrishna imprint the vision on their minds, for then they would have seen what was foreign to them. But these persons, every one of them, realized *that* for which they had been striving. It was the fulfilment of their prayers in a most unexpected manner. It was the fulfilment of their innermost and highest aspirations. What they saw before this (as St Paul expresses it) through a dark glass, they saw now in a clear vision, as if the glass had been removed. What they had been struggling for, what they had been groping after, stood revealed before them.

9. Sanjaya said:

O King, having spoken thus, Hari, the Great Lord of yoga, then showed to Partha His supreme Ishvara form.

Sanjaya then tells King Dhritarashtra that after Sri Krishna, the Great Lord of Yoga (Mahāyogeshvara) has spoken to Arjuna, the supreme form of Ishvara begins to reveal itself. We must not forget that God in His high-

Every spiritual experience is a step advanced on the path of life. It is a glimpse of Him, towards whom we are travelling. Through the mists we see the mountain peak. Higher and higher we climb, sometimes ascending, sometimes descending, but always progressing. Sometimes the vision is clear, sometimes obscured. But He, who is our goal, stands there, immovable, unchanging, waiting, calling, guiding from a distance! And when we hear His voice, we follow. And who is He? That secret will be revealed only when we come very close, when we rise very high, beyond the worldly, materialistic atmosphere; when we rise to where the air is pure and clear. Then we will see Him, who is far and near, than whom none is greater or smaller, than whom none more subtle or vast—very distant first, but now very near.⁷ And great is the surprise, for He for whom we have been seeking in heaven and on earth, in forests and mountain caves and churches and temples and scriptures—He is realized as no other but our own divine Self, our very innermost Existence. He was with us always but we did not know it. We wore a mask and we saw our own reflection masked. We had forgotten that it was a mask. But now we know and the mask is removed. The ego, the personality, is discarded and the Atman shines in His own glory. It is the *real 'I'*, the *real* man.

And now we will see how Sanjaya (who is relating all this to King Dhritarashtra) describes the vision of the Universal Form as seen by Arjuna. Later Arjuna himself relates his experience. But at present

est absolute state is without form. But through His yoga power He appears to have infinite forms and attributes. And among these forms, that seen by Arjuna is the highest.

Sanjaya calls Sri Krishna Hari. One of the

meanings of Hari is 'one who removes'. And Krishna is so called because He removes ignorance, the source of man's suffering.

Endowed with divine sight Arjuna then sees the Ishvara form. And what does he see? He sees a form ...

10. With many mouths and eyes, with many wondrous sights, with many celestial ornaments and with celestial weapons uplifted,

11. Wearing celestial garlands and garments, anointed with celestial fragrant perfumes, the all-wonderful Deity, resplendent, boundless, facing the universe everywhere.

Ishvara faces the universe everywhere, as He is the Self of all beings. It is a glorious vision. With what can it be compared? Oh! It

is beyond all comparison. It excels everything imaginable. Still, to give an idea of that glory by way of example, Sanjaya says:

12. If the effulgence of a thousand suns were to shine at once in the sky, that might resemble the splendour of that great Being.

But that is not all.

13. There in the body of the God of gods, the son of Pandu then saw the whole universe resting together with its manifold divisions.

Arjuna saw in that Universal Form of the Lord the whole universe resting, as it were, with all its various manifestations

of devas, spirits, men, animals, stars, planets and solar systems. It is all contained in Him. Wondrous is the vision, and seeing it,

14. Then Dhanajaya, overpowered with wonder, and his hair standing on end, bending down his head in awe to the Deity, spoke with folded hands.

And now Arjuna declares his own experience. He is filled with wonder and awe. But soon that wonder makes room for ecstasy. His soul is lifted up to higher spheres. Divine energy flows through him. He

cannot contain himself. He must give utterance to that exalted feeling. His heart flows over and he begins to sing the praises of the Lord, relating all that passes before his vision. And so,

15. Arjuna said:

O Lord! In Your body I see all the gods, as well as multitudes of all kinds of beings; Lord Brahmā seated on the lotus throne, all the rishis and all the celestial serpents.

Omnipresent and all-containing Lord, in Your body I see all the devas and all forms, animate and inanimate. Outside of You, nothing exists. Even Lord Brahmā, the Creator of the universe, who is seated in the centre of the Earth-lotus, is contained in You.

The lotus is the emblem of the universe. The supreme Deity, as the Creator Brahmā, is seated in the centre of the infinite universe; this is his lotus seat. 'All the rishis, the great sages of yore, and the celestial serpents are en-

folded in You.' The celestial serpents (the Uragas) are an order of celestial beings who possess great wisdom, usually understood to be in some way connected with serpents.

The Lord has said, 'By Me is this entire world pervaded, and all beings abide in Me.' Yes, it is true. Now Arjuna sees it. Gods, rishis, celestials, even the Creator has his abode in Him. Outside Him nothing exists. Arjuna knew it before but he had never seen it. He accepted it as truth because Sri Krishna had told him so. But now comes realization. It is no longer a

question of believing. It is established knowledge. It is experience. That is very different. We know and we believe many things about God, but once it flashes in our mind as Truth, then it is Knowledge forever. It becomes part of us. We can never again doubt it; we can never forget it. From the deepest recesses of

our being that Knowledge rises up and reveals itself to our consciousness. That is called inspiration, intuition, the still small voice, or the voice of God, who dwells within us, teaching from within.

What else does Arjuna see?

16. O Lord of the universe, O Universal Form, I see You with manifold arms, stomachs, mouths and eyes, boundless on every side; I see neither Your beginning, nor middle nor end.

Yes, that also the Lord has told Arjuna. 'I am the Spirit dwelling in the heart of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings.'⁸ Indeed it is so. 'You are all, O Lord. All these warriors, friends and foes are but Yourself. Formerly I saw the mask; now I see You behind the mask. For-

merly I saw the appearance; now I see the real. You are eating through all mouths, seeing through all eyes. Who is fighting with whom? It is You Yourself; it is Your magic play. You are putting on these different forms of warriors and therefore

17. I see You with diadem, mace and discus; a mass of radiance shining everywhere dazzling to the sight, blazing all around like burning fire and sun, and immeasurable.

Glorious, glorious, a mass of splendour and effulgence is the vision of God. It can be seen only by those who are favoured with divine Grace. None else can behold it. St Paul was temporarily blinded when on his way to Damascus. He says, 'Suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice. ...'⁹ 'And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.'¹⁰ And St John, when he received his revelation on the isle of Patmos, fell as dead. He writes, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.'¹¹ 'And I turned to see the voice that

spoke with me.' (1.12) And when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me: "Fear not. ..."' (1.17)

Such visions are granted to very few, because who can survive it, except a chosen few? Whose brain is strong enough to withstand the shock? Whose physique would not be shattered? But those who survive are lifted beyond all suffering and delusion. Arjuna withstood the shock and came out illumined. But he also could not stand it for long, as we shall see later on. But as it was, he had a wonderful realization. And so he declares in the next verse: From what I have seen it is clear that

18. You are the Imperishable, the Supreme, the One to be known. You are the supreme Refuge of this universe. You are the ever-unchanging Guardian of the Eternal Dharma. You are, I know, the ancient Being.

Arjuna in his vision sees the Deity possessed with infinite forms and attributes. But that vision is so illuminating that he perceives (through the power of faith) even the attributeless Deity referred to in this

verse. He sees the Lord as the Imperishable, beyond time and change, the *One* object, the *One* to be known by all seekers of freedom. You are *that* Knowledge in which everything is known. You are the supreme Refuge of the universe,

the unchanging Guardian of Religion. The universe is safe because it rests in You; as long as You are, the universe will be; and dharma, or religion, is also safe. It may be partly hidden for a time, but You are its undying Guardian.

Your eye is ever watchful and therefore dharma can never be entirely destroyed. It is eternal. You are, I know, the everlasting Spirit, the Ancient Purusha. This is my firm conviction.
And then Arjuna continues:

19. I see You without beginning, middle or end, with infinite power, with numberless arms, the sun and the moon Your eyes, the burning fire your mouth, heating the whole universe with Your own radiance.

The phenomenal is pierced in all directions by the Real and made one with it.

Listen!

20. By You alone the space between heaven and earth and all the quarters are pervaded. O Great Soul, seeing Your marvellous and awesome form, the three worlds are stricken with fear.

Arjuna realizes one truth after another. Has not the Lord promised to His devotees that He destroys the darkness of their ignorance with the brilliant Light of Knowledge? How true it is! Every word that Sri Krishna ever spoke to Arjuna in promise, Arjuna now sees verified.

In this verse we get the first indication of fear. We shall see later how fear overtakes Arjuna. He is not yet ready for this exalted vision, which comes to those heroic souls who tread the path of jnana. He is afraid that he would be merged in the Universal, that he would lose his individuality. He Himself may be swallowed up by those fearful mouths. He forgets that to be swallowed by the Lord is like entering the ocean of Bliss.

And now, in order to remove the doubt entertained by Arjuna regarding his success in

the battle, Sri Krishna proceeds to show him that victory for his army is certain. Seeing this, Arjuna goes on.

(To be continued)

References

1. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.15.
2. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.4.1.
3. *Kena Upanishad*, 1.3.
4. *Bhagavadgita*, 10.41.
5. Adapted from *Ishavasya Upanishad*, 15.
6. *St Matthew*, 11.27.
7. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.7; *Katha*, 1.2.20; *Ishavasya*, 5.
8. *Gita*, 10.20.
9. *The Acts*, 22.6-7.
10. *Ibid.*, 22.11.
11. *Revelation*, 1.10.

As a bird flies to the sky with its two wings, so we must have the two wings of discrimination and renunciation to climb the edifice of Liberation. If one has real discrimination and renunciation, one is safe. A man runs after water in a mirage only so long as he mistakes the mirage for real water. Once the delusion is broken, nobody goes after a mirage for water. The truth is that only he escapes whom the Mother Herself holds by the hand. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A fingerprint is clear when the ink is all right, and if it is bad, the impression is also bad.' Spiritual instructions make a lasting impression only on the mind that possesses discrimination and renunciation.

—Swami Turiyananda

Vivekananda, the Man: Swamiji's Humanity

C S RAMAKRISHNAN

‘*Ātmānariṁ mānuṣariṁ manye, rāmariṁ daśa-rathātmajam*; I consider myself a man, the son of Dasharatha,’ declared Sri Rama. An incarnation of Mahavishnu, he took elaborate care to conceal his divinity. He conducted himself as the ideal man, the role model of ethics. ‘*Rāmo vighrahaṁ dharmah*; Rama is righteousness embodied,’ proclaimed even his enemy Mārica. It is no accident that Swami Vivekananda, who had received the Rama mantra from Sri Ramakrishna, also strove his best to conceal his divine powers and dedicated his life to the service of fellow men. Only a Vivekananda could say ‘We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called MAN.’¹

The Two Modes of the Supreme

The Supreme expresses itself in two modes: that of *paratva*, the transcendental, and that of *saṁlabhya*, easy accessibility. *Paratva* shines as divinity while *saṁlabhya* flows as humanity. The two qualities may appear contradictory on the surface, but they are, in fact, a seamless continuity. When we study Swamiji's life carefully we can see how his divinity does not preclude his humanity. Rather his humanity is all the more vibrant because of the substratum of divinity.

Swamiji's Divinity

Of Swamiji's divinity there can be no doubt. We have it from Sri Ramakrishna himself that Naren had been persuaded to come down from the *saptarshi mandala* to assist him. The first time they met on earth, the Master addressed Naren as Narayana and asked him how he could have been so unkind to have kept him waiting for so long. Swamiji was the gift of Lord Vireshwara of Varanasi, and his

mother could wean him away from mischief only by chanting Shiva's name and pouring water over his head. His brother disciples like Mahapurush Maharaj have actually seen him as Shiva. Never given to anything but truth, Sri Ramakrishna described him as a thousand-petalled lotus.

His More Important Humanity

All this encourages us to put Swamiji on a pedestal and worship him. He is indeed fully worship-worthy, but in treating him as a deity we are doing an injustice to him as well as to ourselves. The deity is separate from the worshipper. Is there not a distance between the two? Not necessarily. Narada invites us to study the passion of the gopikas of Vrindaban for Krishna. They knew that Krishna was not just the son of Yashoda, but he was the ultimate Reality, the Indweller of all hearts. He was *para*, the Supreme. Yet by their passion they had made him their own. He was not separate from them. The magic of love had transformed the impersonal Absolute into the intensely personal Darling. This is *parā bhakti*, *parama prema*. If we are true bhaktas of Swamiji, it behoves us to make him our own. And this can be done only by studying and understanding Swamiji's humanity, the nuances of his many-splendoured human bonds.

Volumes have been written by noted writers about Swamiji as a yogi, as a prophet, as the Vedanta Kesari (Lion of Vedanta), as a patriot, as the awakener of modern India, as an orator by divine right and as the colossus striding across the continents to storm the bastions of ‘ego-centric religious isolationism’. This is magnificent literature, but much more soul-satisfying it will be if we lift the veil a little and gaze at the human face, the human heart

and the human spirit of the great Lover. 'Do not seek for Him [God], just see Him,' he said once. (7.29) Let us therefore not seek his spiritual personality, but see him as a son before his mother, as a disciple before his guru, as a guru before his disciples, and as a master before his pets. Let us enjoy his robust relationship with people, animals, birds, trees and all nature—and above all, his sparkling wit and side-splitting humour.

Swamiji and His Mother

To his mother Bhuvaneswari Devi, Swamiji was strongly attached. He was an enfant terrible like Krishna. He was so restless and naughty that she used to say, 'I prayed to Shiva for a son and He has sent me one of His demons. I had to deploy two nurses to manage him. But aside from occasional outbursts he was a sunny-tempered, sweet and loving child'. And Swamiji would say that it was his mother who inspired him. Her character was a constant inspiration to his life and work. 'I owe her everything that I am.' (2.507) 'The love which my mother gave me has made me what I am, and I owe a debt to her that I can never repay.' (9.203) And Sister Nivedita records, 'Swamiji inherited his royal bearing, intellectual faculties, extraordinary memory and moral purity from his mother.' Sister Christine exclaims, 'How he loved his mother!'²

Sometimes when he was in other parts of India, he would be apprehensive that something had happened to his mother. We find that at his request, Manmatha Babu, his host in Madras, sends a telegram to Calcutta and only when the reply comes that she is quite all right does Swamiji feel relieved. Again, it is recorded that he took the trouble to go to a remote village, Valangaiman, partly by rail and partly on foot, to consult a famous astrologer, Govinda Chetty by name, who also assured him about the good health of his mother. When he was in the monastery in Belur, he would send a messenger post-haste to make sure she was well. To the very end her comfort and care was

one of his chief considerations. When his father died leaving the family in utter penury, Swamiji often declined to eat, saying he had eaten in a friend's house, in order that his mother might not be deprived of food. When finally he had to take sannyasa and leave her to fend for herself, it was a terrible wrench, but he told himself that, as the adage says, for the good of the world everything must be given up. He mentions in one letter, 'I am no hard-hearted brute. If there is any being I love in the whole world, it is my mother. Yet I believed and still believe that without my giving up the world, the great mission which Ramakrishna Paramahansa, my great Master, came to preach would not see the light.'³

And like Shankaracharya, the great champion of Advaita, he went back to his mother in her last days. After his glorious preaching in the West, he came and met his mother. With his head on her lap, with all the pranks and helplessness of a child, he cried, 'Mother, feed me with your hands and make me grow.'⁴

One day, while he was staying at Balam Bose's house, his mother's maidservant came there and asked Swami Brahmanandaji, who was also staying there then, 'Where is Naren?' Thanks to his diabetes, Swamiji used to get no sleep at night and tried at daytime to have few snatches of it. Brahmanandaji peeped into Swamiji's room and finding him asleep, told the maidservant so, and she went away. On waking up and being told that his mother's maidservant had come, Swamiji scolded Brahmanandaji for not waking him up. Thinking that his mother had sent the maidservant for some special work, he immediately called for a hired carriage and reached his mother's place. He asked his mother why she had sent the maidservant to him, and surprised, she told him that she had not sent her. Swamiji then called the maidservant and asked her about it. She replied, 'I went for some work in Baghbazar-Chitpur area and just wanted to look you up. Since Rakhal said that you were sleeping, I came away.' Swamiji repented for

having scolded Brahmanandaji, sent a carriage to Balaram Bose's house to fetch him at the house and when he arrived begged forgiveness of him for scolding him.⁵

Despite his bad health he took his mother along with other family members on a pilgrimage to Dacca and all had a dip in the sacred Brahmaputra river on an auspicious day. In spite of their profound realizations, both Shankara and Vivekananda remained but children to their mothers, and herein lies their greatness.

Swamiji and His Guru

The relation between Sri Ramakrishna and Naren is one of the most bewitching chapters in the history of guru-shishya relationship. In that immortal verse '*Sthāpakaya ca dharmasya*' Swamiji calls his Master *avatāra varīṣṭha*, the supreme Incarnation. This is not hyperbole but a heartfelt tribute resulting from long and strenuous experimentation. He did not accept Sri Ramakrishna and his statements blindly. He tested both rigorously. He challenged his master at every step and so he became sure of every step in the spiritual odyssey. And the Master too was very happy that Naren challenged him. He moulded Naren for his great mission indirectly. When Naren would not accept *vigraha ārādhana*, image worship, Sri Ramakrishna saw this as a handicap, because without accepting the Divine Mother Naren would not be able to tap the shakti necessary for the stupendous mission to be entrusted to him. Hence Guru Maharaj should have contrived the sudden poverty of Naren's family and his having to go to Bhavatarini to supplicate for relief. And Bhavatarini, enjoying the game, made him pray only for jnana, bhakti and *vairagya*.

In Sri Ramakrishna's hands Naren was like clay in the potter's hand. When Naren asked him for nirvikalpa samadhi the Master took him to task for being so narrow-minded as to seek only his own uplift instead of being a

banyan tree whose wide-spreading branches afforded shelter to all the four types of aspirants: *ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthi* and jnani. Sri Ramakrishna did give him the taste of nirvikalpa samadhi one day, but pointed out that he was keeping this treasure under lock and key till Naren had accomplished his mission. And how thrilling is the episode when Sri Ramakrishna, descending from samadhi, rejected the concept of compassion for others and insisted that what is required is service to all God's creation. Swamiji caught the profound implication of this *mahāvākya* and created history by equating renunciation with selfless service and fabricating an organization to make '*śiva jñāne jīva seva*' practical Vedanta. And from his deathbed the Master wrote that Naren would teach the world. He left no option for Naren to retreat inwards, and before he passed away transferred to his beloved disciple all his spiri-

Master and disciple fitted each other like lock and key. Each had made the other completely his own. With the two it was a high-voltage spiritual romance.

tual treasures. Master and disciple fitted each other like lock and key. Each had made the other completely his own. With the two it was a high-voltage spiritual romance. The agony and the ecstasy of each when separated from or united with the other strongly remind us of the romance between Krishna and the gopis. When Swamiji would thrillingly expatiate on the *rāsālīla* he must have been nostalgically remembering his own lila with the Master. 'I am his servant through life after life. A single word of his is to me far weightier than the Vedas and the Vedanta. *Tasya dāsa-dāsa-dāso'-ham*—Oh, I am the servant of the servants of his servants.'⁶ Once while conversing with his brother disciple Swami Yogananda, Swamiji remarked about the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna: 'Even if you might form an idea of the limits of Brahmajñana, the knowledge of the

gan serving the famine-stricken villagers of Murshidabad with just four annas in his pocket. If Swamiji was the moving spirit of the ideal of service to humanity, it was Akhandanandaji who put this ideal into practice.

Alasinga Perumal is a name familiar to us all. This barefoot scholar collected the money for Swamiji's voyage to the West and started the *Brahmavadin* and the *Prabuddha Bharata* to propagate Swamiji's ideas. Swamiji said of him, 'One rarely finds men like our Alasinga in this world—one so unselfish, so hard-working and devoted to his Guru, and such an obedient disciple is indeed very rare on earth.' (7.334) Swamiji continuously wrote to him from America and England, guiding him and inspiring him to work for the regeneration of the motherland. These letters reveal the heart of the patriot-monk who had renounced all worldly ties, but had one love: his country, and one grief: its downfall.

Professor Singaravelu Mudaliar of the Pachappa's College, Madras, came to argue with Swamiji, and criticized Hinduism. But conversation with Swamiji changed him into a devoted disciple. Swamiji used to fondly call him Kidi. We learn that the professor used to subsist on fruits and milk like a parrot. Now, in Tamil a parrot is called *kīḷi*. Swamiji pronounced the word as 'Kidi' and so the name stuck. Swamiji would say, 'Caesar said, "I came, I saw, I conquered." But Kidi came, he saw and he was conquered.'⁷ Renouncing the world, Kidi led the life of a recluse, faithful to the Master till his last breath.

How Swamis Kalyanananda and Nishchayananda established the Sevashrama at Kankhal and Swamis Shubhananda and Achananda opened the Sevashrama in the holy city of Varanasi is a saga that highlights Swamiji's power to inspire his disciples to superhuman selfless service to the afflicted, the lowly and the lost. Did he not say

I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least,

which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next; and may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.⁸

His Disciples and Friends from the West

The men and women in the West whom Swamiji charmed into intimate and genuine friendship form a class by themselves. Dr Wright, Mr and Mrs Hale, the Lyons, the Bagleys—all played their parts in bringing Swamiji into the limelight. Mrs Ole Bull, whom Swamiji addressed as 'mother', contributed substantially to procure the land for Belur Math. To Miss Waldo we owe the text of the 'Raja Yoga', which Swamiji dictated to her, and the 'Inspired Talks', which Swamiji delivered at Thousand Island Park. Of Sister Christine, who dedicated herself to the building up of the Nivedita School in Calcutta, Swamiji would say, 'I worry about everyone except you.' His faith in her innate goodness was so immense.

Josephine MacLeod, Swamiji's Joe, ever remembered his admonition to her to 'Love India' and tirelessly worked to create lovers of India throughout the world. Her sister and brother-in-law, the Leggetts, played host to Swamiji at the famous Ridgley Manor, which has now become part of the Mission in the States. With the Mead sisters Swamiji was so intimate that they felt Christ himself was in their midst. Mrs Edith Allan, whom Swamiji cured of her depression, wrote:

He was so many-sided, wonderfully beyond description. All things to all men; he was all the four Yogas. Sometimes the Vedantic lion, sometimes like a child; to me he was always the patient and loving parent. Nothing was too small for his notice and interest—such love as cannot be comprehended; he always listened. He told me not to call him Swami, but to call him 'Babajji,' as the children did in India.⁹

Swamiji brought life to any gathering and brightness to any household. The older members of the families found in him a son, the young girls saw a sympathetic brother, and the children had in him a superb storyteller.

Madame Calve, the top opera singer of that time, who was cured of her near-fatal depression, said of Swamiji, 'He seems to have emptied my brain of all its feverish complexities and placed there instead his clear and calming thoughts.'¹⁰ The Seviers, who built Mayavati, literally sacrificed their lives for Swamiji. When Mrs Sevier was asked, 'Don't you get bored?' her reply was, 'I think of Swamiji.' Of Nivedita, the spiritual daughter of Swamiji, volumes can be written. This 'lady with the lamp' awakened the Indian masses, gave the soul-stirring slogan of 'Mother India' and designed the first national flag of India. Swamiji saw in her 'the Mother's heart, the hero's will'.

The list of dramatis personae in the epic of Swamiji's life in the West is refreshingly long. His capacity to love was incredible. He felt equally at ease with princes and paupers, children and the elderly, the pious and the fallen. 'They are all of one family. I can see myself in all of them and they in me. The world is one family,' he said. We are reminded of the lesson he learnt from the dancing girl at Khetri. He brought life to any gathering and brightness to any household. The older members of the families found in him a son, the young girls saw a sympathetic brother, and the children had in him a superb storyteller.

Besides Nivedita, England also contributed to Swamiji's mission in Goodwin, to whose note-taking of Swamiji's lectures we owe the bulk of his *Complete Works*. When he learnt of Goodwin's demise at Ooty Swamiji said, 'My last public utterance is over. Now my right hand is gone'. Of his 'faithful

Goodwin' he composed the stirring poem 'Requiescat in Pace'.

In the late evening of 9 December 1900, Swamiji returned to Belur Math from his second trip to the West. The gate of the Math was closed for the night. But can a gate stop Swamiji? He scaled the wall and entered the Math. The gardener in sheer panic reported to the monks, 'An Englishman has entered by scaling the wall.' The surprised monks were wondering who might be the stranger who had the audacity to enter the Math stealthily. And lo, they could not believe their eyes when they found their leader standing before them: 'I heard the bell inviting you all to your supper. I thought I should not miss it.' The monks started dancing. The whole atmosphere vibrated with merriment and melodious songs.

Love for His Pets

Not only were men, women and children dear to him, he felt relaxed in the company of his pets. Antelope and stork, duck and goose, goat and sheep, cow and kid, dog and deer—all were objects of his fondling. He used to talk to these pets. The black kid Matru had free access to his room and used to sleep in a couch near his master. Devotees who came to pay their homage to him would be pleasantly surprised to find him playing and running here and there to amuse Matru. When the kid died Swamiji wept like a child.

His Wit and Humour

Of his bubbling humour let us see a few examples. A Christian missionary had just arrived in a far-off island inhabited by cannibals. He met the tribal chief and asked him, 'Well, how did you like my predecessor?' Smacking his lips, the cannibal replied, 'He was delicious.'

Swamiji was very fond of cream. When Joe sent him some money, he asked, 'Do you

think this will suffice for me?' Joe replied, 'Yes, perhaps you cannot have cream.'

Mrs Steele offered Swamiji dates with the food. The lecture he delivered after this was highly appreciated. Mrs Steele remarked, 'Swami, it was your day.' Quick came Swamiji's reply, 'No, no, madam, it was your dates.'

Once a gentleman asked him after a lecture, 'Swamiji, have you seen God?' Swamiji laughed and said, 'Do I look like it? How can a big, fat man like me see God!'

On another occasion when Swamiji was speaking about the poverty in India a listener said, 'Swami, after seeing you we can hardly believe the occurrence of frequent famines in India.' Swamiji's reply was, 'My tummy is my Famine Relief Fund.'

'Swamiji, you said just the opposite yesterday,' pointed out a lady. He replied, 'Yes, madam. That was yesterday.'

He says in his 'Raja Yoga', 'The first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful. When a man is gloomy, that may be dyspepsia, but it is not religion. ... What business have you with clouded faces? It is terrible. If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day, shut yourself up in your room. What right have you to carry this disease out into the world?'¹¹

* * *

Swamiji was a marvellous combination of sweetness and irresistible force, verily a child and prophet in one. His heart bled for the poor, the lowly and the lost. The Lion of Vedan-

ta roared against injustice wherever he spotted it. But his personality also radiated human sweetness, boundless hope and vastness of soul. His fun-loving nature is enough to convince us that the road to joy and bliss is through renunciation and selfless service. Swamiji was a delightful paradox. He had transcended all bondage but was rich in human bonds. In him Shankara and Buddha met in a beautiful symphony. *

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2. *His Eastern and Western Admirers, Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 175.
3. CW, 8.297.
4. Sailendra Nath Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* (Madras: Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, 1, 1975; 2, 1976), 910.
5. Ibid., 1167.
6. CW, 7.483.
7. *His Eastern and Western Disciples, The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1, 2000; 2, 2001), 367.
8. CW, 5.136-7.
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10. *Life*, 1.450.
11. CW, 1.264-5.

Patriotism

Practical patriotism means not a mere sentiment or even emotion of love of the motherland but a passion to serve our fellow countrymen. I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. My whole soul is afire and I am burning with a fierce desire to change such evil conditions. Let no one talk of karma. If it was their karma to suffer, it is our karma to relieve their suffering. If you want to find God, serve Man. To reach Narayana, you must serve the *daridra-narayanas*, the starving millions of India.

—Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta Is an Investigative Science, Not a Closed System

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

I

There is a widely held opinion among most scientists and Western-educated persons that science means the methodology and the empirical point of view that originated and developed in the West during the last few centuries to investigate facts and the nature of objects and entities in the external world. It is very popular because of its many striking theoretical and technological achievements in the material realm. They also generally hold that the achievements in other fields are non-science or contrary to science, and often decry some of these as superstitions, especially in regard to achievements concerned with the religio-spiritual realm.

The Integral View of Vedanta

This attitude is really contrary to the spirit of *real* science, which should be a comprehensive investigation of all facts and events in every field of life and existence that are experienced, by appropriate systematic methods suited to the nature of the object of investigation, even as Western science does it in regard to its own different fields. All investigations of science as such must be in the context of an integral view of the total existential reality covering all fields—material, mental and spiritual—experientable by man through his

trained external and internal faculties. From this point of view, Western science is only a *partial* science, valid in its own field, related to the material phenomena as an object of the senses. There can be, and there are, several partial scientific views of the external world, valid from their own point of view as far as they go. The dichotomy in and the fragmentary and reductionistic approach of Western science leaves out several important aspects of the infinite existential reality, especially regarding the real nature of the human personality and his inner being, which is the source and centre of all investigation and knowledge, and is the real knower and experienter. The *Bhagavadgita* (13.2-6) points out that the integrated knowledge of both the fields—the external field of the universe as an object, and the internal field of subjective experience, or the Spirit within, which is the real knower and experienter—is the true and complete knowledge.¹

This is the special field of Vedanta, which takes an integral view of all aspects of the infinite existential reality—both the external and internal aspects of experience—and investigates the nature of both the knower and the known, the subject and the object, and the nature and meaning of knowledge itself.²

II

Vedanta is as much an investigative science as other sciences, but with its own field of investigation and its own methods and appropriate instruments.³ Sri Shan-

kara also points out in the *Vivekachudamani*: 'Realizing your Self (Atman) as the Self of all beings by means of scripture, reasoning and your own realization, do away with the super-

imposed notion (that you are the body).⁴ Just as physics and astronomy have their own fields of investigation and adopt their own methods and specialized instruments, Vedanta also holds that existent truths or entities (*bhūta-vastus*) have to be discovered by investigation and experience and not speculated upon.⁵

Opinion- and Investigation-based Knowledge

The *Brahma Sutras* is a philosophical work based on the Upanishads and devoted to the investigation and rational enquiry (*brahma-jijñāsā*) of the nature of Brahman, the infinite spiritual Reality, which is the ground and source of the universe and is immanent in all entities and beings as Atman. Commenting on this important work, Acharya Shankara, the eminent Vedantist of about the seventh century CE (several centuries earlier according to some views), points out that there are two types of views in regard to an entity that is not apprehended clearly: (1) *puruṣa-tantra*, or views based upon the opinions of persons, and (2) *vastu-tantra*, or the view based on the nature of the thing in itself, arrived at after investigation. He says:

With regard to an existing entity (*bhūta-vastu*), different views such as ‘it is thus’, ‘it is not thus’, ‘it is there’, ‘it is not there’ and so on cannot be true knowledge (*tattva-jñāna*), such differences being based on personal opinions (*puruṣa-tantra*). But the true knowledge of an existing entity, as it is in itself, does not depend on such differing opinions, which are false or wrong knowledge (*mithyā-jñāna*). True knowledge depends on the nature of the entity itself. It is *vastu-tantra*, and is arrived at by investigation and direct experience (*anubhava*).⁶

Sri Shankara further points out:

Thus the valid proof (*pramāṇa*) of existing entities is *vastu-tantra*. It being so, the knowledge in regard to Brahman, which is an existent entity (*bhūta-vastu*), is *vastu-tantra*, and does not depend upon our opinions. Hence it must be investigated and realized as it is and not merely speculated upon. For the knowledge of Brahman (*brahma-jñāna*) culminates in its experien-

tial realization (*anubhava-avasānatvāt brahma-jñānasya*), since *brahma-jñāna* relates to an existent entity.⁷

Hence it must be realized through prescribed appropriate methods.⁸ There is also the direct and scientific method of rational analysis of the three states of consciousness experienced by everyone—the waking, dream and deep-sleep states—known as the *avasthā-traya prakriyā*.⁹

Though reasoning is helpful and may be adopted in the process of investigation, reason by itself cannot create any verities or entities, nor can it contradict existing verities and entities, or wish them out of existence, whether they are sensually graspable or supersensually realizable. They exist in their own right and have to be discovered.

An Open and Growing System

Vedanta is an open system like modern science and was ever modifying its empirical viewpoints with progress in other sciences as well as within its own field, to harmonize both with the total knowledge. But due to historical vicissitudes—political subjection and disruption of society—the investigative spirit and integration of new knowledge were held in abeyance, just as the Dark Ages set in in Europe after the eclipse of Greek thought. As a result, there had been a somewhat stagnant condition for a few centuries. But in recent times, the original investigative spirit has been revived, and we can reinterpret Vedanta to harmonize with the recent discoveries of modern science in the empirical field, so far as they are valid facts and not mere speculations, in which many scientists freely indulge. Some of the scientific discoveries and formulations may also have conditional validity. To be adopted by Vedanta in its own system, they have to fit into its framework of total reality as well.

This is what Swami Vivekananda tried to do. He presented Vedanta as a scientific philosophy before the West, even in scientific

The Vedantic system is based on the enquiries and realizations of great sages and savants from time to time from ancient times and has been a continuing process. It is as much a growing, evolving, changing system, when new facts are discovered, even as modern science is.

gatherings and to eminent scientists, delineating the comprehensive nature of Vedanta, which rationally integrates both the empirical and spiritual aspects of reality. He also pointed out in Chicago at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 how the latest discoveries of modern science (in the nineteenth century) seemed like echoes of the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy.¹⁰ It can be seen that modern science is coming closer to Eastern thought with its advancement in microphysics. Prof Capra points out in his *Tao of Physics*:

The basic elements of the Eastern world view are also those of the world view emerging from modern physics. ... Eastern thought, and more generally mystical thought, provides a consistent and relevant philosophical background to the theories of contemporary science. (25)

Atomic physics provided the scientists with the first glimpses of the essential nature of things. Like the mystics, physicists were now dealing with a non-sensory experience of reality and, like the mystics, they had to face the paradoxical aspects of this experience. From then on, therefore, the models and images of modern physics became akin to those of Eastern philosophy. (51)

Thus the mystic and the physicist arrive at the same conclusion: one starting from the inner realm, the other from the outer world. The harmony between their views confirms the ancient Indian wisdom that Brahman, the ultimate reality without, is identical to Atman, the reality within. (305)

It is wrong to think of Vedanta as a closed system of speculative philosophy of a particu-

lar person, as in the case of Western philosophies. The Vedantic system is based on the enquiries and realizations of great sages and savants from time to time from ancient times and has been a continuing process. It is as much a growing, evolving, changing system, when new facts are discovered, even as modern science is. It has been a cooperative endeavour

with contributions from many, rationally debated and established, and spiritually attested through practical spiritual realizations.

Besides its great cultural and philosophico-spiritual attainments, compared age to age, India did not lag behind in empirical scientific achievements either, as pointed out by Will Durant in the chapter on India in *Our Oriental Heritage*. (See also Brajendranath Seal, *Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* and other relevant works on the subject.) Its contributions to empirical science are very great and fundamental. It influenced the West in mathematics and medicine considerably through the medium of the Arabs. India was ahead in almost all the sciences till recently.¹¹

That Vedanta has been a growing system will become evident if one studies historically the growth of the spirit of rational enquiry and the evolution of the different ideas and concepts of Vedanta in the context of its search for the ultimate, comprehensive, all-inclusive Reality, which is the basis of all phenomena as well as experience and knowledge—such as prana, ākāśa, tanmātras, pañca-bhūtas, Prakriti-Purusha, Ishvara, jiva, jagat, Brahman, antaryāmin, pratyak-ātman, maya, jīgnāsā, anveṣaṇa, pramāṇa, sat-kārya, sāksāt-kāra, anubhava and aparokṣa-anubhūti; and the practical methods of realization of the supreme Reality, like the various yogas and the avasthā-traya-prakriyā. One has to begin with the Vedas and go through the several Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Gita* down to the works of Sri

Shankara, Sri Gaudapada's *Man-dukya Karika*, and works like the *Panchadashi* and the *Vedantasara* of Sadananda.

We may also refer to the contribution of new ideas to Vedanta, based on spiritual realizations, by Samarth Ramdas (the eminent guru of the great Shivaji) in his *Dāsa-bodha* in Marathi in the seventeenth century, and recently by the great sages and savants Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Swami Ram Tirth, Dr S Radhakrishnan and others.

With deep insight Sri Aurobindo points out:

If we are to live at all, we must resume India's great, interrupted endeavour. We must take up boldly and execute thoroughly, in the individual and in society, in the spiritual and in the mundane life, in philosophy and religion, in art and literature, in thoughts, in political and economic and social formulations, the full and unlimited sense of her highest spirit and knowledge. And if we do that, we shall find that the best of what comes to us draped in Occidental forms, is already implied in our own ancient wisdom and has there a greater spirit behind it, a profounder truth and self-knowledge and the capacity of a will to nobler and more ideal formations. Only we need to work out thoroughly in life what we have always in spirit. There and nowhere else lies the secret of the needed harmony between the essential meaning of our past culture and the environmental requirements of our future.¹²

Different Methods of Knowledge

Acharya Shankara, the greatest exponent of Advaita Vedanta, was bold enough to state that each type of *pramāṇa* (means of valid knowledge or proof) has its own sphere of operation where it is supreme and fully valid. Shruti (revealed scripture, which records the mystic experiences of sages regarding metaphysical verities and the supreme Reality) has its own sphere, and sense perception and rea-

There is day and night from the standpoint of the earth, but there is no such thing from the standpoint of the sun, which is ever shining. So, for knowledge in each field one has to resort to relevant authorities and the related methodology.

soning based on it in the empirical plane has its own; and in each sphere that particular type of *pramāṇa* is operative and dominant. In the field of sight, the eyes are the authority, and in the sphere of sound, the ears. The one cannot do the job of the other. There is no contradiction between the knowledge given by the ears, say fine music, and the knowledge given by the eyes, say the beauty of the songstress, though both are different and are given by different instruments (senses) of knowledge. Similarly, man gains different types of knowledge and experience, material and spiritual, through his different faculties, such as the senses, the intellect, intuition, trance and mystic perception. Sense experience cannot be a valid authority on the transcendental plane of mystic experience. There is day and night from the standpoint of the earth, but there is no such thing from the standpoint of the sun, which is ever shining. So, for knowledge in each field one has to resort to relevant authorities and the related methodology—and not to some world-famous person or system in another field and their methodology.¹³

Vedanta Not Contradictory to Science

In India, in the past, neither did Vedanta consider itself contradictory to the empirical sciences, nor did those sciences consider themselves contradictory to Vedanta; rather all the sciences accepted and adopted relevant Vedantic concepts in their own systems. The ayurveda system of medicine, for example, considers man as a spiritual being living in association with a physical body and mind. Hence its treatment of the patient is integral and holistic,

whereas modern Western medicine considers man as a psycho-chemical conglomerate, and its treatment of the patient is of an ad hoc nature. Dr Jagadis Chandra Bose, the illustrious scientist, did not find his great discoveries in biology and botany contrary to Vedanta, though they were arrived at according to modern scientific methods; rather he declared in ecstasy that they supported the great conclusions of Vedanta as to the oneness of life and existence at all levels, from minerals to man.¹⁴ Commenting on Dr Bose's experiments, *The Times* of London wrote, 'While we in England were still steeped in the rude empiricism of barbaric life, the subtle Easterner had swept the universe into a synthesis and had seen the *One* in all its changing manifestations.'

Two Aspects of Total Knowledge

We must keep in mind that equally valid alternative scientific formulations are possible as another model. Vedanta does not have to give up its own formulations because science has different formulations in its own field. Biology does not give up its ideas of chromosomes and genes just because physics has found everything to be certain subatomic, vanishing fundamental particles. Moreover, Vedanta does not ask science to give up its formulations and accept its own empirical formulations. Scientific formulations are accepted by Vedanta as valid, as far as they go, in the field of science, with its own methods. Similarly, Vedantic formulations, with its own methods, also should be accepted as valid in the empirical and spiritual fields, as far as they go. As pointed out earlier while discussing the jurisdiction of *pramāṇas*, one system cannot be an authority for another, but both are valid in their own way. They both form aspects of the total knowledge gained by man. *

Notes and References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.2-6.
2. For a detailed study of the Vedantic point of

view in this respect, refer to the author's book *Vedanta—The Science of Integral Reality vis-à-vis Modern Science* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1998).

3. Acharya Shankara says:

The mind that has been made calm and well refined, and rendered subtle by the study of the shastras (scriptures and works dealing with spiritual science) and the guidance of a competent spiritual master (acharya), and is well disciplined by the six ethico-spiritual virtues of tranquillity of mind (*śama*), control of the senses (*dama*), fortitude and perseverance (*titikṣā*), withdrawal from extrovert desires and tendencies (*uparati*), diligent conviction (*śraddhā*) and constant concentrated application to realize the Truth (*samādhāna*), is the instrument for the realization of the inner verities and the Self (Atman-Brahman immanent in all beings).

4. *Vivekachudamani*, 281.

5. The *Gīta* points out, 'The unreal has no existence, the Real never ceases to be; this truth about the nature of both is known by those who perceive the real nature of things.' (2.16)

6. *Brahma Sutras*, 1.1.2.

7. Ibid.

8. The method involves the following:

(a) The cultivation of four essential primary qualifications (*sādhana-catustaya*): (i) discrimination between the Real and the unreal; (ii) non-attachment to the result or fruits of enquiry by personal desires, worldly or otherworldly; (iii) cultivation of the six psycho-ethical virtues such as calmness of mind, control of the senses and forbearance of all difficulties on the way without agitation or reaction (for details see note 2 above and *Vivekachudamani*, 18-26); and (iv) intense desire to be free from all bondages, material and spiritual (*mumukṣutva*).

(b) *Śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana*. The Atman is to be realized by hearing about the Truth from the scriptures and competent spiritual authorities, deep reflection on it ratio-

nally and resorting to necessary concentrated meditational practices.' (*Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.5)

(c) The *Bṛihadaranyaka* and *Chandogya Upanishads* exhort, 'Yat sāṅkṣāt aparokṣāt brahma ya ātmā sarvāntaraḥ; The Atman, which is the directly perceived and immediate Brahman within the inmost core of all beings [is to be searched for.]' (3.4.1-2); 'Sa anveṣṭavyaḥ, sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ; It must be thoroughly enquired into and sought after.' (8.7.1)

(d) The *Taittirīya Upanishad* urges, 'Tapasā brahma vijijñāśasva; Realize Brahman through the concentrated effort of the mind and the senses.' (3.1.2)

(e) The *Mundaka Upanishad* points out, 'Satyena labhyas-tapasā hyeṣa ātmā samyak-jñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam; The Atman is realized through devotion to Truth, concentrated effort of the mind and senses, perfect knowledge attained through sublimation of the sex instinct and firm control of all extrovert desires.' (3.1.5)

9. See *Mandukya Upanishad* and the *Mandukya Karika* of Gaudapada, Sri Shankara's guru.
10. In his book *The Eye of Shiva: Eastern Mysticism and Science*, the well-known French historian Amaury de Reincourt points out, 'From its modern awakening with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself.' (190)
11. Sir Monier-Williams, the great Sanskritist, pointed out in a speech in 1894, 'Indeed the Hindus were Spinozists two thousand years before the birth of Spinoza, Darwinians centuries before the birth of Darwin, and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the Huxleys of our time, and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world.'

12. Quoted in *Yuva Bharati* (Madras: Vivekananda Kendra), December 1979, 33. Jawaharlal Nehru has pointed out in his *Discovery of India*: Science has dominated the Western world and everyone pays tribute to it, and yet the West is still far from having developed a real temper of science. It has still to bring the spirit and the flesh into creative harmony. In India, in many obvious ways, we have a greater distance to travel, and yet there may be fewer major obstructions in our way, for the essential basis of Indian thought for ages past, though not its later manifestations, fits in with the scientific temper and approach, as well as with internationalism. It is based on a fearless search for Truth, on the solidarity of man, even on the divinity of everything living, and on the free and cooperative development of the individual and the species to ever higher stages of human growth.

13. See Sri Shankara's commentary on *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20, for a lengthy and illuminating discussion on *pramāṇas* and their jurisdiction.

14. On 10 May 1901, Dr Bose addressed a scientific audience at the Royal Society in London, and pointed out:

I have shown you this evening autographic records of the history of stress and strain in the living and the non-living. How similar are the writings; so similar that you cannot tell one apart from another. ... It was when I came upon the mute witness of these self-made records, and perceived in them one phase of a pervading unity that bears within it all things ... it was then that I understood for the first time a little of the message proclaimed by my ancestors on the banks of the Ganges thirty centuries ago: 'They who see but One, in all the changing manifestations of the universe—unto them belongs eternal peace—unto none else! (*Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.13)

Manifestations of the Goddess

DR ALAN HUNTER

The main purpose of the article is to review various beliefs in goddesses in ancient and recent cultures. I take the opportunity to just raise the question of the deification of Sri Sarada Devi: has Sarada become a new goddess of an old kind, or is she the age-old Goddess in a new guise, or a new phenomenon altogether? When we worship this unique individual in the twenty-first century, what exactly are we doing? Developing an existing tradition, transforming it, transcending it or starting something entirely new?

Why is it useful to look back at other times or to look out at other cultures? Apart from intrinsic interest, I believe it broadens one's knowledge base and gives a sense of perspective to see a phenomenon as the product of a long historical development. It is also meaningful sometimes to realize that what one may have thought of as a local mode of behaviour or belief is, in fact, widespread, even global in scale.

Researching this article, I was surprised to find how similar are the symbolism and concepts associated with the Goddess in different cultures.¹ People throughout the world—men as well as women—have been worshipping the Goddess for tens of thousands of years. The Goddess has a name, form and ritual in almost every ancient culture of which we have records, as well as in many contemporary societies. It was even more surprising to discover that some of the attributes of the Goddess are remarkably similar even across a time span of tens of thousands of years, and across continents.

How could this coherency arise? Scholars offer various explanations for a phenomenon like this. One possibility is transmission through migration. Nobody knows for sure

how the early peoples—say before 3000 BCE—moved around the earth. Some tracking is done, for example, by examining artefacts, and by DNA analysis. But quite possibly we will never know exactly when and how different ideas, technologies and languages were carried from one part of the world to another. It is quite possible that the worship of a deity was carried by groups of people from one continent to another.

A more imaginative set of theories is that of 'archetypes', as proposed, for example, by the psychologist Jung. These theories generally suggest that certain patterns of thinking are inherent in humanity itself, irrespective of local cultures. So, for example, the worship of the sun is almost universal to all human cultures. Studies of comparative mythology made most famous by Joseph Campbell in his works like *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and *The Masks of God* prove conclusively that important motifs are found in almost every continent, probably beyond the possibility of transmission by contact. Campbell himself believed that mythologies originate in mystical experiences of a culture's sages; they are then usually codified and manipulated by local rulers; and used by uneducated people as the basis for religious belief. Thus it may be that the many common features of gods and goddesses throughout the world can be traced back to a commonality of vision shared by sages of different lands and times. One universal feature that we find in most religions is the simultaneous vision of, on the one hand, a wise, luminous, forgiving, protecting, nurturing Mother Deity; and on the other, a more ambivalent Female Power associated with danger, death, cosmic conflict and renewal.

A more typically Indian way of approach-

ing the question might be to suggest that there is indeed a divine Female Power in the cosmos, which manifests as the various goddesses of different cultures throughout the world. The Sanskrit term *devi* seems to encapsulate this position. In that case, the active power of revealing Herself would be the decision of the Devi. If She happens to enjoy manifesting with various particular attributes across the millennia, She will surely do so. Despite the deep human ignorance, someone may eventually notice it! As a style of writing, I find it convenient to refer to the Goddess as if She is essentially one, manifesting variously. But I am sure that the truth about Her is far more complex and multifaceted than that simple paradigm.

Early Manifestations of the Goddess

Images of the Goddess survive from ancient cultures in South America, Sumeria, Egypt, Turkey, India, China and many other lands. The Goddess is usually closely associated with water, to such an extent that one may say that it is Her characteristic element. Most creation myths of early cultures use the image of 'dark waters' or 'primeval waters' to refer to the state of the cosmos from which the Mother Deity evolves the world as we know it. Further, many cultures had especial reverence for their great rivers, which were seen as watery, flowing forms of the Goddess Herself. These river forms of the Deity are sometimes associated with cows: for example, in early Norse myth, a cow-goddess licks the salty waters of the primordial flux, and thereby creates four great freshwater rivers which sustain human life. And Hathor, one of the oldest female deities of Egypt, was worshipped both in cow-form and as the River Nile. Incidentally, the male consort of the Goddess is represented in many ancient cultures as a bull: perhaps because the Goddess was first envisaged as a cow.

Equally evident is the link between the Goddess and the oceans. Most of the goddesses of the world are described in mythology as having been born from the sea. One of the most famous paintings of the Renaissance is called *The Birth of Venus* by the Italian artist Botticelli. It depicts the emergence of Venus, the goddess of love, from a calm sea—a myth that has its effects to this day, since the tourist authorities on the island of Cyprus promote the spot where this miraculous birth took place. Here the link is easy to see: women's menstruation cycle and the tides are both closely associated with the moon. Moreover,

A more typically Indian way of approaching the question might be to suggest that there is indeed a divine Female Power in the cosmos, which manifests as the various goddesses of different cultures throughout the world.

the crescent horns of the cow are a symbol of the moon in many Indo-European cultures. Women bring forth children; and as the ancients had no doubt intuited, the ocean brought forth the first life-forms. The nexus seems to be fertility-mother-waters-cow.

One could find many other important symbols, but another central theme is the earth itself, Mother Earth. All over the world, people have worshipped different aspects of the earth as aspects of the Mother Deity. For example, in early cultures, mounds may represent pregnancy and hence fertility; caves, the womb; vegetation, renewal and rebirth. In simple terms, the Goddess was perhaps essentially seen as the force that presided over growth of crops and hence over human survival.

Many more images have come down to us through artefacts and mythology, but unfortunately, we do not have much idea about what concepts lay behind them. Simple explanations are sometimes misleading. For exam-

ple, early European Egyptologists noted that many pyramids have pictures of women holding their own breasts. They assumed that these pictures depicted some kind of association with sexuality or child-rearing. However, when the hieroglyphs were finally deciphered, they stated that this posture is prescribed for women in mourning, which is why they appear like this on the giant tombs.

Some of the earliest iconography already associates the Goddess closely with the lion. Lions are depicted on what is thought to be a goddess altar in one of the famous decorated caves in France, dated to the middle-Paleolithic era, around 16,000 BCE; and close by there is an unusual red figure known as the Lion Queen. Later images of female deities with lions' heads, or with lions as companions, are extant from Hittite, Babylonian and Egyptian civilizations dating from 3000 BCE or earlier. It is strange to think, when we see Mother Durga on her lion in the twenty-first century, that we are heirs to a tradition of perhaps 20,000 years. Perhaps the association with lions is a hint at the fierce aspect of the Goddess, conceivably derived from observation of any mother's fighting instinct when her offspring are threatened? Yet although it is undoubtedly a tremendously important part of humanity's religious heritage, it serves little purpose to speculate about the meaning of all these images from prehistoric times. The Great Mother, presiding over birth and survival is undoubtedly one aspect of the meaning; but there are surely many others.

In more recent times, two female deities, Mary and Guanyin, are today central to the cultures of two important parts of the world's population: Roman Catholics and Chinese, respectively. Since they both evolved within literate cultures, we have a rather clear idea of when, where and why they are worshipped: what a goddess means to her devotees. We notice an evolution of understanding. The earlier symbols which appear, at least superficially, to be related to physical procreation and fertil-

ity, give way to a more refined, spiritualized understanding of a mother deity.

The Virgin Mary

The Virgin Mary is heir to West Asian traditions of Goddess worship that pre-date Christianity by centuries. Sumerian, Egyptian and Greek mythologies—all tell of a male deity, like Jesus Christ, who is killed for the salvation of humanity, but who miraculously survives death after a three-day stay in the underworld, and who returns to improve the lot of a suffering world. This myth is presumably linked to the vegetation cycle in early agriculture. The hero-god evidently sprang from a Divine Female, at the same time virgin and mother, who was known as Demeter in Greece and Isis in Egypt. Cults were formed around this Divine Mother Herself. In popular religion, She is the one who may provide protection, healing or off-spring. To more reflective devotees, She was seen as virginal yet life-giving; imbued with wisdom and compassion; the Creatrix of the universe; Goddess, Consort and Mother of God.

The cult of the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition is assuredly not based on any biblical text. In the whole of the Christian Bible there are only perfunctory references to Mary. After her miraculous impregnation and various stories associated with the birth of Christ, she virtually disappears from the narrative of the Gospels. From time to time the Roman Catholic hierarchy tried to restrict the worship of Mary but with no success at all. Evidently the worship of a goddess was profoundly structured within the religious consciousness of the Mediterranean area, and the Catholic Church eventually decided to incorporate it rather than struggle against it. Hence from about 400 CE we find theologians starting to 'discover' that the Virgin Mary herself was without sin, herself born from a virgin mother, and herself an intermediary between humans and God.

The Virgin Mother soon gained a reputa-

tion for performing miracles. Relics were found to please the faithful; new scriptures were composed, new hymns written, new forms of worship prescribed. As can be seen today in many Catholic countries, the cult of Mary rivals, if not outstrips, that of her son Jesus. By the eleventh century, St Anselm could ascribe to her the following virtues: 'By you [Mary] the elements are renewed, demons are trampled down and men are saved, even the fallen angels are restored to their places. O Woman, so full and overflowing with grace, plenty flows from you to make all creatures green again.'

Still today, Mary inspires massive pilgrimages, outbreaks of healing and general devotional fervour throughout the Roman Catholic world. In 1954 the Catholic Church officially declared Mary to be 'Queen of Heaven': this designation is used, for example, in the vespers when she is addressed as 'Queen of Heaven ... whence the light of the world has arisen'. She is perhaps pleased with this ancient title, which in earlier eras was given to both Isis the Egyptian Goddess and Ishtar the Babylonian one.

Recently I visited Malta, an intensely Roman Catholic country. The following prayer, a typically simple yet heartfelt plea, is used in homes there:

Sweet and gentle Lady, Immaculate Mother of God, we choose Thee this day as the Mistress and Lady of this house. Guard it, dear Mother, from pestilence, fire, lightning and tempest, from schisms and heresies and from the malice of enemies. Protect its inmates, sweet Mary, watch over their going out and their coming in and preserve them from sudden death. Keep from us all sin and harm, and pray to God for us that we may live in His Service and depart this life in His Grace. Amen.

Guanyin

It is perhaps strange that in China, at the far end of Asia, a parallel creation was taking place: a hitherto unknown female image became enthroned in the Chinese consciousness

to such an extent that today she is unquestionably the main deity of the Chinese people: the bodhisattva Guanyin. Almost everywhere one travels in China today, one finds images, statues, paintings, temple art and architecture devoted to Guanyin. When the Jesuits first reached China and began to learn about her they found it rather disconcerting that a female deity with attributes apparently very similar to that of the Virgin Mary was already well established there. They even dubbed her the 'Goddess of Mercy', a name that is still sometimes used by Europeans to refer to her. In fact, the name Guanyin literally means 'observer of sounds', a compression of a longer name meaning 'the one who hears/observes the cries of the world'.

Sinological research has elucidated the background of this great goddess.² Her origin lies in the Mahayana worship of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, whose name was translated as Guanyin in Chinese. Until about the tenth century CE, this bodhisattva was depicted, as were most Buddhist deities, as a male, in fact somewhat like a handsome young Indian prince. In iconography, this bodhisattva often carries a lotus in one hand and a water flask in the other. He also frequently appears wearing white clothes, seated on a rock surrounded by flowing water, the scene illuminated by a full moon. One of his main attributes is compassion for the suffering: he is a protector and healer. He will also save devotees from painful after-death experiences and free them from rebirth. On a more philosophical level, the moon and water were widely used to symbolize the ephemeral nature of phenomena; the idea is perhaps that the bodhisattva will lead to salvation those who do not cling to maya.

An important element in the formation of the Guanyin cult was the establishment of Buddhist worship at the island of Putuo, a small island in the East China Sea not far from present-day Shanghai. By about 900 CE, it seems that Chinese Buddhist authorities had

identified this island with the scriptural Potalaka, the abode of Avalokiteshvara. It was evidently a place vibrant with the devotion of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, and the abode of many monks and nuns. The image of a white-robed saviour, associated with the moon and water, was well established.

Then in 1080 a crucial incident occurred. A Chinese court emissary on his way to Korea, Wang Shunfeng, came dangerously close to shipwreck during a storm near the island. In fear, he prayed to Guanyin. Suddenly he had a remarkable vision of a brilliant golden light. Guanyin appeared before him, first in human form wearing a pearl necklace, then in the form of a golden moon. The ship and its crew were saved; Wang related the incident to his fellow travellers. From about this time, local Buddhist artists appear to have painted and soon afterwards sculpted the image in female form. Over the next century, pilgrims were increasingly blessed with visions of a female deity, clothed in white, and associated with water and the full moon. For example, in 1148 CE another government official, Shi Hao, had a clear vision where he could see her eyes and eyebrows, and brilliant white teeth. The goddess Guanyin was born.

Soon, other incidents in Chinese religious tradition were absorbed into the imagery. One of the most famous was the story of Princess Miaoshan. Around 1100 CE, the abbot of a temple and a local official in the district of Xiangshan in the inland province of Henan jointly started to promote the cult of Guanyin. The model here was not, however, the moon-and-water goddess of the ocean island. Rather, they related an incident originally recorded in a text that seemed to miraculously come into their hands. It told of a local princess who was wondrously pure, who practised Buddhism, and who refused to marry. Her father became very ill, with a paralysed arm and a blind eye. Without hesitation the princess cut off her own arm and plucked out her eye to give to him: he was cured. She passed away, but im-

mediately manifested in a heavenly form with one thousand arms and one thousand eyes, before reverting to a two-armed goddess-like form. She entered a stupa that became a major pilgrimage centre. Still today, the white-robed, two-armed form and the thousand-eyed, thousand-armed form are the two most popular icons. Putuo and Xiangshan are today destinations for millions of pilgrims.

Another element in the formation of the cult was probably the low social status of Chinese women in the then patriarchal society. As in many cultures, a woman was always blamed, often beaten and abused, for failing to produce male offspring. One of the most earnest prayers of a young wife was that she should bear sons. Yet Chinese women of some sectors of society at least were virtually prohibited from contact with non-family males. On an intimate topic like procreation, perhaps the idea of communicating with a strange male—even if he was a bodhisattava—was difficult. At the very least, the male god might seem remote and forbidding. So the idea of a female deity to which one could pray for sons, and on other intimate matters, was evidently very appealing; and to this day, one sees thousands upon thousands of Chinese women in deep communion at the images of Guanyin.

Martin Palmer, a British Sinologist, has noted that 'Guanyin is the most important of all the deities [in China]. ... She inspires a devotion and affection which is without parallel in Chinese society, and her miracles are countless.' Palmer even recounts a contemporary miracle. A Chinese friend of his had drunk too much alcohol one night and created a disaster for himself and others by causing a car accident. As he lay paralysed in hospital, he remembered Guanyin and started to pray earnestly. Some nights later, he saw her enter through the hospital window and touch his arms and chest: he regained the use of his torso, although not of his legs. He interpreted the healing as 'Guanyin gave him back as much as she could. But because he had caused

death and suffering through his own stupidity and pride, she could not or would not restore him completely. He has to live with the consequences of his actions, but she gave him back the possibilities of a life again.³

However, Guanyin does not function only at the level of popular prayer. She is the deity presiding over the most abstruse philosophical texts in Chinese Buddhism and revered by learned monks and nuns as the essence of transcendental wisdom. Like the Virgin Mary, she is a multifaceted goddess who provides solace to the distressed and down-trodden but equally brings devotion and knowledge to those who seek them.

Sarada Devi

The Virgin Mary and Guanyin are relatively recent deities, at least compared to the ancient mother goddesses of earlier civilizations. By the modern age, they have become the objects of worship of two of the largest, numerically speaking, devotional cults in the world. The deities themselves have many attributes. Perhaps outstanding among them are transcendental wisdom, intercession with God, compassion, nurturing and power. They are objects of devotion for the general populations and also for monastics, priests and religious hierarchies. In their honour thousands of prayers and hymns are composed, temples and churches built, statues erected and ceremonies enacted. For many Chinese and almost all Roman Catholics, religious life without these deities would be almost unthinkable.

I have avoided mention of the Hindu goddesses in this article, because I am sure that readers know them far better than I do. The parallels, perhaps some differences, with the various forms of the Devi may be apparent. But how does the above account tie in with what we know of Sri Sarada Devi? Is she,

too, heir to an ancient tradition, or a fresh new phenomenon? Does it make sense at all to approach her as the latest link in a long historical chain, or would it be better simply to ignore the past and take her as we find her in biographies and oral tradition?

On one level, it seems that the powers and qualities ascribed to Sri Sarada Devi by her devotees are similar to those of the Virgin Mary and Guanyin: motherly compassion, transcendent wisdom and the power to save—to name but a few. She is seen as a gentle and all-embracing mother who at the same time can help to give release from rebirth through divine Wisdom; one who has immense power in both material and spiritual matters; one who

Sri Sarada Devi is seen as a gentle and all-embracing mother who at the same time can help to give release from rebirth through divine Wisdom; one who has immense power in both material and spiritual matters.

can intercede with the male deity—and the supreme Godhead—on behalf of her devotees.

The worship of Sarada conforms more or less to the pattern of worship that Hindus accord to their goddesses in general. For example, temple worship would include ritual offerings of flowers, food, incense, light and other items, sometimes accompanied by devotional singing. Mental worship would be conducted by dedicated devotees. The above modes of worship are incidentally rather similar in many Christian and Chinese Buddhist traditions, where devotees are also expected to use a rosary to help with recitation of the deity's name. The basic function of the rituals—to establish an intense personal relationship with the deity, to invoke her through ritual practices in an icon, photograph or mental image—seems to me to have an element of continuity with tradition, and a link with global

patterns of religiosity.

However, one unique point of this historical phenomenon is the worship as deity of a woman who actually lived in the recent past, and whose life story is relatively well documented. As we have seen above, the personalities and forms of Guanyin and Mary (as well as Sita, Radha or Durga) are basically a cultural accretion of visions, artistic inspiration, local cults and religious imagination. The figure of Sarada arises from the 'real' world: like that of Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna.⁴ I wonder if this is the first time in history that a real woman has been seriously accorded the status of a deity, of a goddess. Most likely there have been short-lived attempts with other women/ deities, but the worship of Sarada has been continuing for many years and shows no sign of abating: on the contrary, through the efforts of the Ramakrishna Mission, Sarada Math and numerous private organizations, it is currently growing rather rapidly.

Perhaps even more important is the further purification of the ideal. Some devotees may doubtless pray to Goddess Sarada for health and wealth, but the ideology of the movement strongly emphasizes a purely spiritual approach: if one asks for anything, it should be spiritual progress, knowledge and devotion. We are far away from any primitive symbolism related to cow-horns, lions, ocean-births. The woman Sarada was very clear that she would not have physical sons or daughters, but instead have millions of spiritual children.

In fact, she is perhaps the first deity envisioned purely as the embodiment of spiritual principles, one might say Vedantic principles, rather than as an accretion of older needs and yearning. Why has she appeared at this juncture in history? Is it perhaps because only now a rather large number of people have become familiar with Vedanta, willing to forego the traditional solaces in favour of a more austere approach to religion? And yet it is a strange

thing, which personally I find rather heartening, that some of the moving stories about Sarada's life on earth are still related to traditional ways of the Goddess: we read in many accounts of her love of rivers and tanks, the life of the countryside, the moon. There is even a charming photograph of hers on a bullock cart. When we imagine her lila at Jayrambati, we are still perhaps heirs to generations of imagery, albeit with a purified or refined intent.

I would suggest then that our Sri Sarada Devi is a new kind of goddess, as far as world religious history goes. At the level of ritual techniques, the worship of Sarada shares something with traditional worship of Hindu and even non-Hindu goddesses; but there has been a significant shift towards a more sophisticated conceptualization of her attributes and powers, and the purpose of the worship. She shares with Lord Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna the rare quality of being a historical figure becoming a deity; but unlike them she is, of course, female. She is a unique creation, or perhaps one should say unique creator: Vedantic Goddess sprung from human female form. *

Notes and References

1. Two useful studies are Shahrukh Husain, *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality and the Female Divine* (London: Duncan Baird, 2000); and Devdutt Pattanaik, *Devi: The Mother Goddess* (Mumbai: Valiks, Feffer & Simons, 2000).
2. See for example Chun-Fang Yu, 'Guanyin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteshvara' in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1859*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 151-83.
3. Martin Palmer, *Travels through Sacred China*, (London: Thorsons, 1996), 91-2.
4. One could of course add Rama, Krishna and Jesus here, but contemporary scholarship cannot definitively state whether these men were historical or legendary figures.

India's Rejuvenation: Swami Vivekananda's Vision

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

1. Preamble

Swami Vivekananda envisioned a rejuvenated India: '... a wonderful, glorious, future India will come. I am sure it is coming—a greater India than ever was. ... Arise, awake and see her seated here on her eternal throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was—this motherland of ours.'¹ Seeing the degeneration and degradation all around—moral and spiritual poverty, value erosion, corruption, selfish aggrandizement, unabashed dishonesty, glorification of muscle and money power and lack of indigenous cultural moorings, one naturally heaves a deep sigh and wonders if Swamiji was carried away by his innate predilection for oriental hyperbole. When will such a glorious India come, if at all? Or is it mere wishful thinking?

We believe that Swamiji was not only a prophet and a seer—one who could *see* into the future, a *trikālajña* rishi (a sage who had first-hand knowledge of the past, present and future); he was also a scientific visionary, one who had made a thorough, in-depth and scientific study of world history with special reference to India. His capacious and luminous mind could move at will over the entire gamut of world culture and civilizations, world religions and thought currents. But in all this, the special reference point was always India. Mother India was the Goddess of his adoration and anything concerning her stirred him always to an impassioned eulogy of her past glory. Then would follow a tearful description of her present state of utter degradation and helpless prostration before the glamorous West. The fitting finale would be a prophetic envisioning of India's glorious future, when his sonorous voice would animate extraordinary pictures

of her rejuvenation. Sister Christine's remarkable reminiscences are worthy of recollection here:

Our love for India came to birth, I think, when we first heard him say the word, 'India', in that marvellous voice of his. It seems incredible that so much could have been put into one small word of five letters. There was love, passion, pride, longing, adoration, tragedy, chivalry, *heimweh*, and again love. Whole volumes could not have produced such a feeling in others. It had the magic power of creating love in those who heard it. Ever after, India became the land of heart's desire. Everything concerning her became of interest—became living—her people, her history, architecture, her manners and customs, her rivers, mountains, plains, her culture, her great spiritual concepts, her scriptures. And so began a new life, a life of study, of meditation. The centre of interest was shifted.²

When Swamiji spoke of India, it was not nationalism or patriotism of the narrow type—*my* country, right or wrong. From his deep study of world history and the rise and fall of world civilizations, Swamiji understood the role that India was destined to play in the comity of nations. His profound insight revealed to him that in the great economy of God, India had been assigned the specific and particular task of *spiritualizing humankind*. In order that India may deliver this great gift of spirituality, perform this all-important task, the vitality of the race ought to be preserved: a vigorous, powerful India, 'rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was', should emerge. In his first public lecture at Colombo, soon after his triumphal return from the West, Swamiji articulated his vision, born of meditative insight:

Thus, everyone born into this world has a bent,

a direction towards which he must go, through which he must live, and what is true of the individual is equally true of the race. Each race, similarly, has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Each race has to make its own result, to fulfil its own mission. Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world, whenever circumstances are propitious. ... India's gift to the world is the light spiritual.³

This was why Swamiji felt so emphatically that a new India, rejuvenated and fully awakened to her spiritual responsibility, was an urgent necessity. For Swamiji believed that India and India alone could discharge this vitally important responsibility: 'to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race', for the good of the world (*jagat-hitāya*), 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many' (*bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya*), as Buddha said.

The urgency of this message cannot be felt more poignantly at any time than now, when the whole world is in a state of panic and anxiety. No amount of scientific and technological advancement has been able to remove the terrifying, frightful monsters of insecurity and fear, terror and trepidation from the hearts of warring nations. Years ahead of the World Wars, Swamiji predicted that the whole of the Western world was sitting on a volcano, which needed to be quenched by the waters of Indian spirituality:

Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality! Ay, as has been declared on this soil first, love must conquer hatred, hatred cannot conquer itself. Materialism and all its miseries can never be conquered by materialism. Armies when they attempt to conquer armies only multiply and make brutes of humanity. Spirituality

must conquer the West. Slowly they are finding out that what they want is spirituality to preserve them as nations. They are waiting for it, they are eager for it. Where is the supply to come from? Where are the men ready to go out to every country in the world with the messages of the great sages of India? Where are the men who are ready to sacrifice everything, so that this message shall reach every corner of the world? Such heroic souls are wanted to help the spread of truth. Such heroic workers are wanted to go abroad and help to disseminate the great truths of Vedanta. The world wants it; without it the world will be destroyed. The whole of the Western world is on a volcano, which may burst tomorrow, go to pieces tomorrow. They have searched every corner of the world and have found no respite. They have drunk deep of the cup of pleasure and found it vanity. Now is the time to work so that India's spiritual ideas may penetrate deep into the West. ... We must go out, we must conquer the world through our spirituality and philosophy. There is no other alternative, we must do it or die. The only condition of national life, of awakened and vigorous national life, is the conquest of the world by Indian thought.

At the same time we must not forget that what I mean by the conquest of the world by spiritual thought is the sending out of life-giving principles, not the hundreds of superstitions that we have been hugging to our breasts for centuries. These have to be weeded out even on this soil, and thrown aside, so that they may die forever. (277-8)

This, then, is the background of Swamiji's constant emphasis on the rejuvenation of India. This was his favourite theme and he would return to it again and again. It moved him, on the one hand, to heights of eloquence as seen in the passages above; and, on the other, stirred him to the inmost depths of his sensitive soul, crying with impatient longing for the early rise of an awakened India, *prabuddha bharata*. For he felt that if such an India failed to rise, then all spirituality and high moral values would vanish from off the face of the earth. 'Such a thing can never be,' he said:

Shall India die? Then from the world all spiritu-

ality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as

its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. (4.348)

2. Scientific Rejuvenation

2.1 The Inner versus Outer Sciences—Lopsided Growth?

As we have seen above, Swamiji was eager to wipe out all the encrustations that had accumulated over the ages in the pure and scientific religion of Vedānta, which our Indian rishis and thinkers had propounded. He wanted to propagate a scientific, rational and dynamic system, impersonal in nature, and therefore acceptable to modern minds. He rediscovered the ancient theme of our rishis, that the physical, mental and spiritual sciences form one coherent whole. The spiritual science, the science through which the Infinite and the Absolute, the Imperishable (*akṣara*) is realized was called *parā vidyā*, while the study of the physical and mental sciences were classified as *aparā vidyā*. The classification of knowledge into *parā* and *aparā* did not indicate their superiority or inferiority. At best it indicated a sense of priority and at the worst a hint that the *aparā vidyā* need not (and perhaps should not) absorb too much of one's attention, for it does not deserve to be pursued with avidity, being ephemeral in nature. On the other hand, a pursuit of the *parā vidyā* confers immortality, eternal Freedom and Bliss. However, the *parā vidyā* and the *aparā vidyā* formed one collective and coherent whole, with the same deity Sarasvati presiding over both. In fact, the *Bhagavadgita* categorically states that complete knowledge consists in the knowledge of the outer as well as the inner: *Kṣetra-kṣetrajñāyor-jñānaṁ yat-tat jñānaṁ matam mama*.⁴ *Kṣetra* refers to the outer, literally, 'the field of manifestation of the Spirit'; and *kṣetrajña* refers to the indwelling Spirit, literally, 'the Knower of this *kṣetra*'. Swamiji, therefore, wanted that India should make advances

in all these sciences—and more particularly in the sphere of physical sciences, which had been neglected for ages thanks to an excessive and perhaps lopsided preoccupation with the mental and spiritual sciences. Even the study of mental science was largely eclipsed by that of spiritual science, for the latter exercised an overwhelming influence on the development of the former; investigations into the mind were carried out insofar as they proved helpful in the in-depth understanding of the secrets of the spiritual realm. These inner sciences—mental and spiritual—being more fascinating to the contemplative Indian mind, the outer sciences—physical sciences—suffered quite a bit of neglect. The best brains of the country came to be engaged in researches into the inner sciences. Various schools of thought emerged, and debates and discussions—what we now call symposia, colloquia, seminars and conferences—proliferated among these schools; so much so that illumining results emerged and were clearly documented. The Upanishads are glorious examples of such documentation. Commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) on these texts came to be written; glosses (*ṭikās*) were written to explain these commentaries; and explanatory notes (*ṭippanis*) were added to these glosses. There was such an upsurge that mental and spiritual wisdom became an integral part of the national psyche. Even the so-called illiterate person with no formal education could dilate with ease and deep understanding on many of these inner scientific discoveries. But all this flurry of activities was at a goodly price: the utter neglect of the outer, physical, sciences. Explaining this absorption of the entire race with things spiritual and therefore very subtle, Swamiji said:

There is no end to the power a man can obtain. This is the peculiarity of the Indian mind, that when anything interests it, it gets absorbed in it and other things are neglected. You know how many sciences had their origin in India. Mathematics began there. You are even today counting 1,2,3, etc. to zero, after Sanskrit figures, and you all know that algebra also originated in India, and that gravitation was known to the Indian thousands of years before Newton was born.

You see the peculiarity. At a certain period of Indian history, this one subject of man and his mind absorbed all their interest. And it was so enticing, because it seemed the easiest way to achieve their ends. Now, the Indian mind became so thoroughly persuaded that the mind could do anything and everything according to law, that its powers became the great object of study. Charms, magic, and other powers, and all that were nothing extraordinary, but a regularly taught science, just as the physical sciences they had taught before that. Such a conviction in these things came upon the race that physical sciences nearly died out. It was the one thing that came before them. Different sects of Yogis began to make all sorts of experiments. ...

The whole idea was to get at the basis, to reach the fine parts of the thing. And some of them really showed most marvellous powers. ... It is the extreme belief of the race. What power is there in the hand or the sword? The power is all in the spirit.

If this is true, it is temptation enough for the mind to exert its highest. But as with every other science it is very difficult to make any great achievement, so also with this, nay much more. Yet most people think that these powers can be easily gained. How many are the years you take to make a fortune? Think of that! First, how many years do you take to learn electrical science or engineering? And then you have to work all the rest of your life.⁵

While appreciating and applauding the inner scientific discoveries—advances in the mental and spiritual sciences—Swamiji realized that the time was come to correct this lopsided growth. Ignorance of the physical sciences engendered any number of superstitions, which in turn adversely affected the pristine conclusions of the mental and spiri-

tual sciences.

Further, Swamiji understood and felt that the Indian mind was rich in scientific temper and outlook. If only this temper was brought to bear upon the physical sciences, India would make a profound advance in these outer sciences too, as much as in the inner sciences of mind and the spirit. Indian minds leading the computer software development technology all the world over is a case in point.

2.2 The Guiding Scientific Principles of Indian Thought and Their Rejuvenated Application

Swamiji identified certain distinctive characteristics of Indian scientific thought that enabled the Indian mind to investigate into the inner sciences; he was convinced that these selfsame scientific principles, when applied to the outer sciences, could unravel many a mystery of the universe—both in the microscopic realm of the atom and the nucleus as well as in the macroscopic domain of the outer space, massive planets and so on. Swamiji envisaged a rejuvenated application of these principles—hitherto used by Indian spiritual scientists (rishis) only in the inner scientific realm—to investigations in the physical sciences also. Since the passing away of Swamiji, these principles have indeed been successfully applied in the physical sciences.

We shall now discuss some of these principles and in fact show specifically how the physical sciences—twentieth-century ‘new physics’, in particular—have, in fact, made breathtaking discoveries through the application of these principles. All of them, however, are subsumed in the principle of unity, that there is an underlying unity in the midst of the apparent diversity, which may be considered as nothing but manifestations of the fundamental Unity.

2.2.1 The Generalization Principle

Swamiji discovered a remarkable characteristic of the Indian mind in its capacity to

generalize—that is, to draw generalized conclusions from particulars. Swamiji in fact called such a mind ‘courageous and wonderfully bold’; in being able to make an intuitive leap from the particular to the general, definitely and boldly. Elaborating his thesis, Swamiji said in his ‘Jnana Yoga’ lectures:

Coming to the principles, we find these Vedic thinkers very courageous and wonderfully bold in propounding large and generalized theories. Their solution of the mystery of the universe, from the external world, was as satisfactory as it could be. The detailed workings of modern science do not bring the question one step nearer to solution, because the principles have failed. If the theory of ether failed in ancient times to give a solution of the mystery of the universe, working out the details of that ether theory would not bring us much nearer to the truth. If the theory of all-pervading life failed as a theory of this universe, it would not mean anything more if worked out in detail, for the details do not change the principle of the universe. What I mean is that in their inquiry into the principle, the Hindu thinkers were as bold, and in some cases, much bolder than the moderns. They made some of the grandest generalizations that have yet been reached, and some still remain as theories, which modern science has yet to get even as theories. For instance, they not only arrived at the ether theory, but went beyond and classified mind also as a still more rarefied ether. Beyond that again, they found a still more rarefied ether. Yet that was no solution, it did not solve the problem. No amount of knowledge of the external world could solve the problem. ‘But,’ says the scientist, ‘we are just beginning to know a little: wait a few thousand years and we shall get the solution.’ ‘No,’ says the Vedantist, for he has proved beyond all doubt that the mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits—beyond time, space, and causation. As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time, and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three. What does the statement of the exis-

tence of the world mean, then? ‘This world has no existence.’ What is meant by that? It means that it has no absolute existence. It exists only in relation to my mind, to your mind, and to the mind of everyone else. We see this world with the five senses but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had yet another sense, it would appear as something still different. It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existence, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence. (2.90-1)

Within a few years of Swamiji’s passing away, Einstein’s relativity theory, basing itself on the famous Michelson-Morley experiment, dealt a deathblow to the ether theory. Our common-sense conceptions of space and time underwent a radical change. Einstein successfully applied the Equality Principle to discover the now famous principle of special relativity theory that there is no preferential frame in nature so that all laws of physical phenomena must be invariant when referred to different frames of reference. This Equality Principle is a particular application of a more general principle, namely the Symmetry Principle. There is an underlying symmetry in nature, which gives rise to the following string of characteristics: symmetry → impartiality → impersonality → equality (*samatva*). In its application to investigation into the nature of matter, the Symmetry Principle has led to some startling discoveries, which we will discuss presently. It is worthwhile to note here that the Generalization Principle and the Symmetry Principle are related to another important principle, namely the Unification Principle.

2.2.2 The Unification Principle

The Generalization Principle is about trying to see the particular as a special case of the general. One simple example that school physics would give you is that of the neutron and the proton. These are the well-known constituents of an atomic nucleus. The neutron, as the

name implies, is neutral while the proton is positively charged. Interestingly, both of them are almost of the same mass. Taking this sameness as the key to generalization, we could say that these two particles are just two manifestations—two different charge states— of a single particle called the ‘nucleon’. A nucleon, then, can exist in two charge states: in its positive charge state, it is called a proton and in its neutral state, the same particle is a neutron. Two is thus reduced to one—rather, the two particles are *unified* into one. This can be viewed in terms of the Symmetry Principle as follows: there is an underlying symmetry into which these two particles could be subsumed and the manifestation as two particles is simply that the same nucleon exists in two different charge states. We could then enlarge this concept to accommodate more particles (with a common key, like mass in the case of the proton and the neutron) and subsume them into a larger symmetry. Since this symmetry is quite different from the kind of symmetry we ordinarily see in space, we could call it some kind of *internal symmetry*. Such symmetric schemes are well known in elementary particle classification. Larger and larger unifications have been attempted over the years by developing super-symmetric schemes. The hope is that ultimately *all* particles could perhaps be considered as the manifestation of *one* particle.

A similar attempt has been made in regard to forces or interactions found in nature. We now know that nature admits of four types of interactions: weak, electromagnetic, strong and gravitational. While the first three have applications in the micro-world, gravitational force is felt predominantly only in the macro-world. Now, the human mind seeks a generalization, a unification, by asking the following question: Is it possible to subsume all these forces into a single force and consider these different forces as manifestations of that one force? Encouragingly, we have come a fairly long way: we have been able to unify the first three—weak, electromagnetic and strong.

These are called the Grand Unified Theories (GUTs). Unfortunately, there is this loner: the gravitational force, which still eludes our unification attempt. As we said earlier, whereas the first three are quantum mechanics-dependent, owing allegiance to the Uncertainty Principle, gravity is a ‘classical’ theory—a different species altogether! Supergravity theories that came up were at one time believed to be the right answer to the unification of gravity with other forces, but they have not proved satisfactory. Attempts at quantum gravity theories are under way, but the problem appears very complex. But for nearly two decades, the so-called String Theory has held sway, in which the basic objects are not particles, but strings that have length but no other dimension.

Defining the goal of science, Swamiji said more than a hundred years ago: ‘The end and aim of all science is to find the unity, the One out of which the manifold is being manufactured, that One existing as many.’ (1.133)

And again:

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion becomes perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world. (1.14)

In modern times, physicists are vigorously pursuing the very same idea to find a Unified Theory. Einstein attempted it years ago, but in vain. This Theory of Everything (ToE) is the Holy Grail of physics in this century. In the words of Stephen Hawking, ‘The eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe. ... And our goal is nothing less than a complete description of the universe we live in.’⁶

2.2.3 The Symmetry Principle

The Symmetry Principle, based once again on the principle of unity, has contributed considerably to the revolution of our concept of matter at the beginning of the twentieth century. Quantum mechanics owes its origin to this principle. The relativity theory and quantum mechanics together wrought a thought revolution unmatched in its profundity and power.

We would consider two remarkable applications of this principle: (a) wave-matter symmetry, leading to the development of quantum mechanics or wave mechanics, and (b) microcosm-macrocosm unity, which is the basis of many a discovery—for example, the discovery of the Rutherford atom model (with planetary electrons) and the General Theory of Relativity as the theory of gravitation based on Mach's principle, leading to radical changes in our concepts of space and matter and their interrelation.

2.2.3 (a) Wave-particle Dualism and the Development of Wave/Quantum Mechanics

The dawn of the twentieth century saw the birth of a remarkable theory that revolutionized our concept of matter and radiation. Max Planck propounded the Quantum Theory of Radiation, according to which radiation occurs not as waves, but in discrete energy packets (which are like particles) called 'quanta'. The energy content of each quantum, however, is proportional to the frequency of the radiation—the particle concept is thus wedded to the wave concept. The quantum theory was applied with remarkable success to a large number of phenomena like photoelectric effect, Compton effect and Bohr atom model. Thus quantum theory came to be established on a firm footing as *the* theory of radiation. Now, these two, namely matter and radiation, being the two fundamental manifestations of nature, the Symmetry Principle (and the concepts arising therefrom (symmetry → impartiality → impersonality → equality) immedi-

ately forces us to the following conclusion: *If radiation has a particle aspect as a quantum, it should naturally follow that matter should have a wave aspect.*

Arguing from this principle, de Broglie enunciated his startling theory of 'matter-waves', which says that a moving particle behaves as a wave, with a definite wavelength derivable from the particle momentum—once again wedding the wave concept (wavelength) with the particle concept (momentum).

Several questions immediately came up: What is the nature of this wave? How is this wave to be interpreted? What is its physical significance? Two great physicists, Schrödinger and Heisenberg, started from two points of view and then formulated a mechanics of these waves, called wave mechanics and quantum mechanics, respectively. These two were found to be identical except for the language. It is now well established that all physical phenomena in the micro-world (of the atom, nucleus, sub-nuclear particles and so on) are governed by quantum mechanics. Soon, Dirac and others made successful attempts to wed this to relativity; relativistic quantum mechanics was thus born.

This threw us back to the fundamental question: What then is a particle? In place of talking about a particle, one then talked about *fields*. These fields were then *quantized* to find the particle—a recovery, as it were. Very recently, physicists started talking about *strings* rather than particles. Thus the excitement about what a particle is in the first place, continues unabated in all its fury! On the application level, these matter-waves were found to undergo diffraction and so on like any other physical waves, leading to the invention of electron microscopes with staggeringly high enlarging capabilities. Medical science could progress by leaps and bounds thanks to these instruments. The guiding principle of all this exercise, however, is the Symmetry Principle.

2.2.3 (b) The Microcosm-Macrocosm Unity

One of the earliest principles of the ancient Indian rishis in their attempt to probe nature's mystery was the microcosm-macrocosm unity. By applying the projection principle, projecting microcosm on macrocosm, they were able to formulate their theories about the cosmic phenomena. This, once again, is the well-known psychological principle of projecting from the known to the unknown: the microcosm is within our grasp, and since microcosm and macrocosm are built on the same plan, projecting the former on the latter could unravel the secrets of the macrocosm. Several examples could be cited.

Nature of the cosmic Person: What is the nature of the supreme, cosmic Person? This is a question that has been engaging the attention of thinking individuals since time immemorial. The projection principle was applied successfully by our ancient rishis to answer this question: projection from the individual (relatively more known) to the cosmic (unknown). You study the individual, the micro-person; analyse him thoroughly; then project, aspect by aspect, to the macro-level. You then have a picture (or, more correctly, model) of the cosmic Person.

In analysing the individual person, our ancient rishis discovered three levels: the gross, the subtle and the causal. The micro-aspect of each of these levels was then related to the three states of waking, dream and deep (dreamless) sleep. The corresponding macro-aspects were then obtained by the micro-macro projection principle. An important case in point: projection of the macrocosmic Virāt, Hiranyagarbha and Īśvara from the microcosmic *viśva*, *taijasa* and *prājña*, corresponding respectively to the gross (waking), subtle (dream) and causal (deep sleep) levels.

The famous 'Purusha Sukta' gives a vivid description of this cosmic Person, whose body is the macrocosmic counterpart of the individual body, whose mind is the macro-mind (cosmic Mind)—in short, whose consciousness is

the cosmic Consciousness.

In Vedanta, the micro-macro equation has come to be applied only at the highest spiritual level. The other two levels, the physical and mental, have found very little application. Perhaps for the first time in the modern age, Swamiji wanted a revival of this equation *even at the physical and mental levels*. Thus, apart from the spiritual monism which Advaita Vedanta propounded, Swamiji spoke about two other kinds of monism: monism at the physical level and monism at the mental level. In his famous 'Paper on Hinduism' at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, he called these two levels of monism as 'materialistic monism' and 'philosophical monism'.⁷ This revival of physical as well as mental oneness has profound implications for modern society. In fact, physics had shown clearly the reality of physical oneness and Swamiji was aware of this. Very soon after Swamiji's passing away, Einstein propounded his Special Relativity Theory, followed by the General Relativity Theory. The latter theory was also a theory of gravitation. In formulating this theory, Einstein drew great inspiration from the philosophical thought of the German philosopher Ernst Mach. In his autobiographical sketch, Einstein mentioned that his reading of Mach's philosophical writings decisively furthered the critical reasoning required for the relativity theory. He further said that his whole direction of thinking was along the lines of Mach's thought, so that if one considered Mach to be a precursor of the General Relativity Theory, one would be perfectly justified. Mach's thoughts reflect nothing but the physical monism that Swamiji spoke about. In fact, Swamiji forcefully described this in his lecture on 'The Mission of the Vedanta':

The other great idea that the world wants from us today, the thinking part of Europe, nay, the whole world—more, perhaps, the lower classes than the higher, more the masses than the cultured, more the ignorant than the educated, more the weak than the strong—is that eternal

grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the whole universe. I need not tell you today, men from Madras University, how the modern researches of the West have demonstrated through physical means the oneness and the solidarity of the whole universe; how, physically speaking, you and I, the sun, moon, and stars are but little waves or wavelets in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter; how Indian psychology demonstrated ages ago that, similarly, both body and mind are but mere names or little wavelets in the ocean of matter, the Samashti; and how, going one step further, it is also shown in the Vedanta that behind that idea of the unity of the whole show, the real Soul is one. There is but one Soul throughout the universe, all is but One Existence. This great idea of the real and basic solidarity of the whole universe has frightened many, even in this country. It even now finds sometimes more opponents than adherents. I tell you, nevertheless, that it is the one great life-giving idea which the world wants from us today, and which the mute masses of India want for their uplifting, for none can regenerate this land of ours without the practical application and effective operation of this ideal of the oneness of things. (3.188-9)

Swamiji's vision of microcosm-macrocosm unity: Swamiji had a vision of this micro-macro identity when he was meditating under a peepul tree in Almora. Arising from this profound meditative awareness, he recorded his experience in his diary. An English rendering of what he noted down in Bengali runs as follows:

In the beginning was the Word etc.

The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the universal Soul in the Living Prakriti [Nature]—the objective universe. Shivā [ie Kali] is embracing Shiva: this is not a fancy. This covering of the one [Soul] by the other [Nature] is analogous to the relation between an idea and the word expressing it: they are one and the same; and it is only by a mental abstraction that one can distinguish them. Thought is impossible without words. Therefore, in the beginning was the Word etc.

This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless. (9.291)

This scientific principle of micro-macro projection that Swamiji actually *saw* in an intuitive vision, he was boldly applying even in the socio-politic realm. We refer to his statement quoted at the very beginning: 'Thus, everyone born into this world has a bent, a direction towards which he must go, through which he must live, and what is true of the individual is equally true of the race.'

Swamiji was here relying upon this scientific principle of projection, which has been responsible for many a path-breaking discovery in physical science. We see here two more examples.

Rutherford atom model: It is well known in the history of atomic physics how Rutherford arrived at his nuclear atom model. From large-angle scattering of alpha particles, he had come to a definite conclusion that the entire positive charge of the atom is concentrated in a very minute region inside it. This he called the 'nucleus'. The next question was, how are the negative charges distributed around the nucleus? When no amount of speculation worked, he applied, in a stroke of intuitive genius, the above micro-macro projection principle, albeit in the reverse order. He projected the sun onto the nucleus, and then the various planets revolving round the sun in elliptical orbits automatically got projected on to the negatively charged electrons. This projection gave him immediately the 'planetary electrons', with the electrons revolving round the nucleus very much like the planets round the sun. On application of Planck's quantum theory, the experimental match was immediate and more or less accurate. When the fine structure of spectral lines was discovered, Sommerfeld once again used the projection principle with success: these planetary electrons were revolving in elliptical orbits, and relativistic variation of their mass with velocity need-

ed to be applied. When the hyperfine structure of the spectral lines came up, the theory was further refined: once again the projection principle—look at the macrocosm and project backward to the microcosm. The concept of electron spin, like the internal rotation of the planets, was introduced and the experimental match obtained. Then came space quantization by the application of the same principle, and so on.

The projection principle is used above as an analogy to understand the unknown from the known. The other example is the nuclear structure. We briefly discuss it below.

Liquid drop model/Shell model of nucleus: The answer to the question of what the nuclear structure was like came once again from an analogy: from the known to the unknown. Two models of the nucleus are well known: the liquid drop model and the shell model. The liquid drop model came from drawing the analogy of the liquid drop to the nucleus—each force in the liquid drop was correspondingly projected. From this, Weizsacker arrived at a formula called the ‘semi-empirical mass formula’. Interestingly, it was this formula that gave the precise reasoning and information about nuclear fission and the consequent release of enormous amounts of nuclear energy. This phenomenon of nuclear fission was used to manufacture atomic and nuclear bombs for destructive purposes on the one hand, and to make nuclear reactors for constructive purposes on the other. It is interesting how this simple principle of projection (analogy) could become responsible for the release of astounding amounts of nuclear energy due to fission. Such is the power of thought!

It is interesting to note that this projection principle was known to and used by the ancient Indian rishis ages ago. And Swamiji was keen to revive the scientific temper of our ancients and bring about a rejuvenated application of this temper.

2.2.3 (c) Symmetry and Conservation Principles

We could briefly mention here the crucial role played by what is known as the principle of conservation and discuss its relation to symmetry. Conservation of certain well-known physical quantities is the bedrock of science; conservation of mass-energy and conservation of linear and angular momentum are too well known. Now, there exists an intimate connection between symmetry and conservation (invariance) laws. This connection is embodied in what is known as Noether’s Theorem. In the micro-world—the sub-atomic realm of elementary particles—the charge (C) conservation, left-right (parity) symmetry (P) and time-reversal symmetry (T) have played a vital role in our understanding, leading to what is called the CPT theorem.

Swamiji has tried to apply the principle of conservation to socio-political situations and tried to derive some remarkable conclusions. The intimate connection between symmetry and conservation could be invoked to reinforce his theses and enunciate generalized theorems in the socio-political sphere. While a detailed discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, we mention this just to show how Swamiji wanted scientific principles to be applied to society as well: for all human existence forms one coherent whole.

3. Conclusion

The scientific rejuvenation in Swamiji’s vision of a rejuvenated India, therefore, is twofold: (1) the revivification of the fundamental scientific principles discovered by our

ancient rishis, and (2) the practical application of these principles to every department of human activity and every sphere of human endeavour—in one word, their application in

everyday life, for universal well-being.

Swamiji has identified some of these fundamental principles, like the ones mentioned above, the most fundamental, according him, being the *solidarity or oneness of the universe*. He called these 'life-giving principles'. It behoves us, then, to: (1) discover what these principles are (apart from the ones Swamiji himself mentions specifically); (2) reverentially contemplate them to find out how they could be applied to every department of human activity and to every sphere of human endeavour, for the welfare of the entire humankind; and (3) Test their effectiveness by actual application, individually and collectively.

If we, as a nation, apply ourselves to this noble task, realizing the power of thought in bringing about individual and collective welfare, social change and uplift, India could hope, in the not-too-distant future, to become a superpower—not for bullying other nations or for bulldozing them to accept our own ways of thinking or to dominate over them, but for establishing a reign of peace and blessedness. The great treasures in the form of 'life-giving principles' and powerful ideas that we have inherited from our forefathers in this blessed land should be spread broadcast all over the world. Swamiji's prophetic utterance in this context should fill us with fresh zeal and redoubled energy to accomplish this task:

For a complete civilization the world is waiting, waiting for the treasures to come out of India, waiting for the marvellous spiritual inheritance of the race, which, through decades of degradation and misery, the nation has still clutched to her breast. The world is waiting for that treasure; little do you know how much of hunger and of thirst there is outside of India for these wonderful treasures of our forefathers. We talk here, we quarrel with each other, we laugh at and we ridicule everything sacred, till it has become almost a national vice to ridicule every-

thing holy. Little do we understand the heart-pangs of millions waiting outside the walls, stretching forth their hands for a little sip of that nectar which our forefathers have preserved in this land of India. (3.317)

If only we could deeply share this agony that Swamiji felt, and awaken without delay to this enormous national responsibility, a rejuvenated India of Swamiji's dreams would become a reality. The entire world is waiting with bated breath, anxiety and panic writ large in its wrinkled forehead, for peace and blessedness. It is India, and only India, that can create such an atmosphere of peace and benediction. For it is from India that noble ideas, powerful thought currents, expressive of joy and immortality, have emanated since time immemorial: '... ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it.' (3.106)

May we endeavour tirelessly to actualize Swamiji's dream of a rejuvenated India; and may the entire world be deluged with the waves of love, peace and benediction flowing out from this rejuvenated, glorious India, as from an eternal spring. *

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A man should be like his tea: his real strength appearing when he gets into hot water.

—*The Irish Digest*

An Embodiment of Universal Motherhood

PROF AMALENDU CHAKRABORTY

Pages of Indian history throughout the millennia are illumined by the lives of saintly men and women radiating their brilliance from different spheres of action. It may be noticed that one common element in their make-up is spiritual strength. Purity, humility, devotion, self-control, selfless love—in fact, all that go to adorn spiritual life have always been valued in India more than material gains and sense-enjoyments. The ideal of discovering one's real Self and thus manifesting the divinity lying within the individual has been glued to the national mind from the Vedic age. After all, human life is meaningless without the pursuit of ideals, because ideals offer unity and direction to human existence and propel mankind from a lower to a higher level of spiritual evolution.

Uniqueness of Indian Culture

One of the loftiest ideals developed from early Vedic times is the ideal of motherhood, which adds distinctiveness to Indian culture. While the West worships women foremost for their youth and beauty, the ideal woman revered and worshipped in India is the mother—the unselfish, loving, magnanimous, sacrificing, all-forgiving mother—and to this end she dedicates her life. From the Hindu standpoint,

a woman may be a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter or something else, but basically she is a mother. As Swamiji said, '... in India the woman was the visible manifestation of God and that her whole life was given up to the thought that she was a mother, and to be a perfect mother she must be chaste.'¹ The mother image is the symbol of perfect chastity and desirelessness, and it is love, pure and simple, that remains at the pinnacle of feminine ideals of spiritual India.

An Overarching Feminine Ideal

Sri Sarada Devi, our Holy Mother, is recognized with reverence by most Hindus as the quintessential role model of the overarching feminine ideal of motherhood in modern times. Her motherhood derives greater relevance because it rekindled the image of the ideal Hindu woman at a time when India was experiencing a terrible crisis of the spirit. At this critical juncture came Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Sarada Devi. Soon the latter's divinity and spirituality enshrined her as an incarnation of the Mother of the Universe. It also provided spiritual strength and regeneration to a number of devotees whom she embraced as her very own children. Sri Sarada Devi demonstrated throughout her life

Her divinity and spirituality enshrined her as an incarnation of the Mother of the Universe. ... She demonstrated throughout her life that real emancipation of women lay not in the crusade for sexual equality but in the building of a feminine character, which would form the essence of female

that real emancipation of women lay not in the crusade for sexual equality but in the building of a feminine character, which would form the essence of female power. So we can say without hesitation that her life and message will remain forever the fulfilment of the feminine ideal, which will elicit male reverence as worthy

manifestations of the Eternal Feminine.

This most powerful influence behind the conceptualization of divine motherhood was given profound significance and brought to reality by Sri Ramakrishna. He taught the world that to worship God as Mother represented the final stage of spiritual evolution, and that by considering every woman, save his wife, as a mother, man could free himself from the snares of carnality and impurity. He demonstrated that God and the Self, or Atman, are sexless, thus perceiving man and woman to be really one and complementary. He also taught that the highest experience of God is not compatible with the enjoyment of the flesh. Just as a man can subdue his lust by seeing in a woman the symbol of the Divine Mother, so too a woman can contain her sexuality by regarding every man, except her husband, as her child. She is, in essence, the mother of all men, no matter what other relationship society may sanction. Sri Ramakrishna made all women the manifestations and extensions of the Divine Mother. By actually worshipping God as Mother, he transformed the theoretical concept of the Motherhood of God into a living reality.

A Primary Receptacle of the Divine Shakti

Sri Ramakrishna consecrated Sri Sarada Devi as the mortal embodiment and symbol of the Divine Mother on earth. He worshipped her as the living Goddess and saw no difference between her, his earthly mother and Kali, his Divine Mother. Through the Shodashi Puja, which Sri Ramakrishna performed during Sri Sarada Devi's first visit to Dakshineswar, the latter was enthroned on the altar consecrated to the divine Deity, and the divine presence of the Universal Mother was invoked in her. Sri Ramakrishna prayed, 'O Di-

vine Mother! Thou eternal virgin, the mistress of all powers, and the abode of all beauty! Deign to unlock for me the gate to perfection. Sanctifying the body and mind of this woman, do Thou manifest Thyself through her and do what is auspicious.'² The significance of this worship for Sri Sarada Devi was that it awakened in her the realization of her divinity as the manifestation of the Eternal Feminine for all humanity to worship. We come to know from Swami Gambhiranandaji, Sri Sarada Devi's chief biographer, that when she descended to her normal self after the spiritual awakening, she never lost sense of the identity with the Divine and retained it throughout her life. In addition, the worship symbolized her participation in Sri Ramakrishna's life and in his spiritual ministry. By virtue of her purity and simplicity, Sri Sarada Devi became the primary receptacle of the divine Shakti, which manifested through her to the fullest culmination in modern times. In a word, Sri Ramakrishna left behind Sri Sarada Devi, the

Sri Ramakrishna also taught that the highest experience of God is not compatible with the enjoyment of the flesh. Just as a man can subdue his lust by seeing in a woman the symbol of the Divine Mother, so too a woman can contain her sexuality by regarding every man, except her husband, as her child. She is, in essence, the mother of all men.

Holy Mother, as the living ideal of womanhood. 'To me it has always appeared,' wrote Sister Nivedita, 'that she (Sri Sarada Devi) is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new?'³ Perhaps the explanation is that Sri Sarada Devi constituted the bridge between the past and the present, between the old and the new.

Mother of All

The various facets of Sri Sarada Devi's life would appear to be like the sun's rays passing through a prism, radiating multiple points of brilliance. Purity, holiness, love and quiet suffering are some of the attributes of ideal motherhood that lie embedded in the heart of every woman. Although she could not experience the joys of motherhood (being married to the ascetic Sri Ramakrishna), her motherly affection flowed unremittingly and

Although she could not experience the joys of motherhood, her motherly affection flowed unremittingly and impartially towards all. ... Out of the abundance of her heart, Holy Mother offered love to one and all, without distinction of caste, creed, colour or race. Hundreds of thousands of devotees thronged to her in an endless procession day and night.

impartially towards all. She was the mother of the hardened Muslim brigand Amjad, just as she was the mother of the noble monk Swami Saradananda and that gifted Irish lady, Sister Nivedita. Out of the abundance of her heart, she offered love to one and all, without distinction of caste, creed, colour or race. Hundreds of thousands of devotees thronged to her in an endless procession day and night. She once said that 'the excessive manifestation of Divinity creates fear in the minds of devotees; they cannot feel intimate.'⁴ For the whole of the thirty-four years of her widowhood, she continued to propagate Sri Ramakrishna's message that God is not merely an object of faith, but has to be realized in one's own life through the practice of renunciation and service. Thus her life became an example of the essential character of womanhood—a beautiful blending of work with worship—earning

for her the everlasting, endearing epithet 'Holy Mother'.

An Eternal Beacon for Women

In our living memory, we do not know whether any divine incarnation was worshipped, while living, in the way Sri Sarada Devi was. Her life and motherhood has been glowing as a beacon for women everywhere. The most inspiring element in her life was her unconditional love for everything. Here lies

Sri Sarada Devi's significance to modern womanhood. She was indeed a living bodhisattva, offering her life and love as one uninterrupted silent prayer of renunciation and service. 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life ...' wrote Swami Vivekananda from America. '... Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. ... Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus,

once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world.'⁵ The great beginning of this feminine renaissance was marked by the advent of Sri Sarada Devi, who manifested to the world the latent and kinetic divinity of women as symbols of feminine virtue through her universal motherhood.

An Icon of Triumphant Womanhood

Today, at the forefront of the twenty-first century, female educationists, humanists, human rights activists and feminists are holding seminars and conferences, and declaring their right to equality, freedom, power and prestige. One should not forget that it was Sri Sarada Devi who offered them the vision and understanding of their real identity as the manifestations of the Motherhood of God, as Madonnas, as Shakti. Let us not forget her

prayer, 'O Lord, there is stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!'⁶ It is no wonder that spiritual giants like Swamiji and Swami Brahmananda trembled with heightened spiritual emotion and reverence in her presence. In this light, the concept of gender liberation runs much deeper and is thus too complex to be explained away in terms of individual autonomy. 'Every profound truth,' wrote Sister Nivedita, 'waits for the life that shall be all its voice, and when that is found, it comes within the reach of the multitude to whom it would have remained inaccessible.'⁷ Indeed, Sri Sarada Devi's illustrious life remains the mirror in which the eternal soul of India is reflected. She remains immortal to us not simply for what she did, but for what she stood for: triumphant womanhood beyond the creeds of the world. In the radiant aura of her magnetic motherhood, Sri Sarada Devi stands incomparable as one of the most compelling and evocative spiritual and cultural icons of human civilization. Whatever aspect of Sri Sarada Devi one reflects upon and embraces, one will simply find that to be something only a Holy Mother can bestow. Whether we are dead or alive, she will continue to protect us all. So let me conclude my dissertation with the following hymn composed by Swami Abhedananda, one of the earliest monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna: 'O Sarada, Goddess propitious, destroyer of misery in souls resigned,/ Saviour of religion in every age,/ ... O Mother kind,/ Givest Love and Wisdom Thou,/ Grace Incarnate! To thee I bow.'⁸ *

She remains immortal to us not simply for what she did, but for what she stood for: triumphant womanhood beyond the creeds of the world. In the radiant aura of her magnetic motherhood, Sri Sarada Devi stands incomparable as one of the most compelling and evocative spiritual and cultural icons of human civilization. Whatever aspect of Sri Sarada Devi one reflects upon and embraces, one will simply find that to be something only a Holy Mother can bestow.

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If you love a human being, you will have to suffer for it. He is blessed, indeed, who can love God alone. There is no suffering in loving God.

—Holy Mother

Awakening India

DR A P J ABDUL KALAM

I am delighted to participate in the inauguration of the Cultural Centre built in and around Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House. I congratulate the Ramakrishna Mission for having conceived of and implemented this project. I understand that the ancestral house of Swamiji has been restored without disturbing the original structure. My pranams to the swamis here and greetings to the organizers, members of the Ramakrishna Mission, educationists, disciples of Vivekananda, state and central government functionaries and distinguished guests on this historic occasion.

Vision of Vivekananda

Friends, when I am in this beautiful environment, the ancestral house of Swamiji, let me recall an event that took place in a ship that was sailing from Japan to Canada in 1893. Two great human beings were travelling in it. They introduced themselves to each other. They were Swamiji and Jamshedji Nusserwanji Tata. Swamiji asked Tata where he was going and what was his mission. Tata said, 'Swamiji, I am going with a mission to bring steel industry to our country.' Friends, that was in 1893, when India was ruled by the British. Swamiji said, 'It is indeed a beautiful mission. My best wishes. However, I would like to give you a small caution. Whatever amount you spend to get steel, simultaneously you should learn the metallurgical science of making steel also. I would prefer you to start an institute, a laboratory to do advanced research on the subject.' What a prophetic statement! Many things happened after that. Jamshedji Nusserwanji Tata could not get the technology for manufacturing steel from the UK. However, he could get the know-how of manufacturing steel from the US and established the Tata Iron

and Steel Company (TISCO) at Jamshedpur. A big planning followed. It had two parts: the first part was to start a steel manufacturing plant at Jamshedpur. Simultaneously, he donated one sixth of his property for establishing an institute for material research in Bangalore.

I visited Jamshedpur some time back and saw the fruits of Jamshedji Nusserwanji Tata's labour: four million tons of steel a year being produced by TISCO. Due to his foresight, India is today self-reliant in steel technology. We also see that the seeding for the research laboratory has now been transformed into a great learning centre: the Indian Institute of Science. This incident demonstrates the vision of the great personality Swamiji. His vision was to have a strong and developed India. He clearly foresaw the role of science, technology and industry. It is Swamiji who made Jagdis Chandra Bose get a patent for his invention. His call for the awakening of India was not merely in the spiritual field, but for its all-round economic and social progress.

Strong Bonds among Religions

Friends, when I was a professor at the Anna University in Tamil Nadu, I had invitations from many institutions in Rajkot. One invitation was from the Bishop of Rajkot, the Reverend Father Gregory Karotemprel, CMI, who asked me to inaugurate the Christ College. On the same day, I addressed a gathering of nearly one lakh students at a function to give the 'Vision of Life' organized by Swami Dharmabandhu. Later, I was to go to Porbandar to participate in the students' meet organized by the Ramakrishna Mission centre there. I was also enriched by my visit to Alfred School, Rajkot, where Mahatma Gandhi had his early education. I would like to share with

you two incidents that occurred in the above environment on the same day.

Before the inauguration of Christ College, I was invited to the bishop's house in Rajkot. When I entered his house I felt as if I was entering a holy place. There was a unique prayer hall, where all religions were represented, respecting each religious sentiment. When the reverend father was explaining to me the significance of his creation of the unique prayer hall, there was a call from the nearby Swaminarayan temple requesting me to visit their temple. When I told this to the reverend father, he said he would also accompany me. When we entered the temple and reached where the image of Lord Krishna was enshrined with splendour, it was a unique experience. It was noon, when the temple is normally closed, but it was specifically kept open for us on that day. We were all received with the offering of tilak on our forehead. It was a great sight with the reverend father, Abdul Kalam and Sri Y S Rajan having the shining tilak on their foreheads. This incident demonstrated the strength of connectivity of several religions in our country leading to a unique spiritual experience. Cumulative actions following that event led to the Surat Spiritual Declaration in October 2003, in which the Ramakrishna Mission also played a great role.

The Power of Prayer

The next was a beautiful event. The swamiji of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, requested me that I must visit his centre for a few minutes on my way to the airport. When I reached there, I found a spiritual discourse in progress on Ramakrishna's teachings and Swamiji's mission of life. The discourse was followed by a prayer call. Spiritual singing engulfed the hall with rhythmic musical notes. I joined the prayer along with hundreds of devotees. The spiritual environment and the intensity of prayer put me onto a different plane. To the surprise of my friends and the swamiji accompanying me, the prayer took me to a different

plane, and that day I found that time became indeterminate. This can be the effect of an integrated spiritual environment. Now when I am in Swami Vivekananda Heritage Building, my mind is experiencing a spiritual feeling similar to the one I experienced in Rajkot.

Digital Library Initiatives in India

I understand that this centre has planned a textbook library as a part of its activities. I would like to discuss the digital library initiative in India, which can be useful for the textbook library and the research centre of this campus.

There is a mission called 'Digital Library Initiative' to create a portal for digital libraries in India, piloted by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Carnegie Mellon University, USA, as partners for fostering creativity and free access to all human knowledge. As a first step, this digital library will create in India a free-to-read searchable collection of one million books by 2005. So far we have digitized 80,000 books in India, out of which 45,000 books are available online in nine regional languages. The textbook library authorities of this Cultural Centre can seek the help of Prof N Balakrishnan, IISc, for digitization of their books and other related access software through the Digital Library Initiative. The storage capacity is doubling every year. Today one can get 300 GB disks, of a few grams of weight, for around \$100. This disk can hold more than 30,000 books. In ten years' time, a disk of the same size will hold 30 million books, larger than the largest library in the world—a library on your palm. The digital library of this Cultural Centre can be integrated with the Visva-Bharati University and other universities in Kolkata, which will facilitate researchers to study Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, comparative religion and Indian culture.

PURA (Providing Urban amenities in Rural Areas)

I also understand that the Cultural Centre is planning a rural and slum development centre for rendering service to poor people in villages and slums. I thought of sharing with you the concept of PURA, which may be useful for rendering advice and support to rural masses.

PURA will minimize the migration of people from rural to urban areas. Our plan is to make the rural environment so attractive that there can be a reverse flow from urban to rural areas. This will certainly help in reducing the major congestion taking place in a small number of big cities, leading to inadequate infrastructure, pollution, crime, diseases and poor quality of life in these cities.

Rural Prosperity through Connectivity

In our country nearly 700 million people are living in 600,000 villages. Connectivity of village complexes providing economic opportunities to all segments of people is an urgent need in order to bridge the rural-urban divide, generate employment and enhance rural prosperity. The essential needs of the villages today are water, power, roads, sanitation, health care, education and employment generation.

The integrated methods that will bring prosperity to rural India are as follows: (1) Physical connectivity of village clusters through quality roads and transport; (2) Electronic connectivity through telecommunication with high-bandwidth fibre-optic cables reaching rural areas from urban cities and through Internet kiosks; (3) Knowledge connectivity through education, vocational training for farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and entrepreneurship programmes—thereby leading to (4) Economic connectivity by enhancing the prosperity of village clusters in the rural areas by starting enterprises with the help of banks and micro-credits, and marketing products. The Cultural Centre can make use of this concept and adopt a few village clusters near Kolkata

and facilitate creation of PURAs in partnership with NGOs, philanthropists and banks for enriching the lives of the rural masses. That will be a fitting tribute to the memory of Swamiji.

Conclusion

Dear friends, I am reminded of Swamiji's exhortation to our people: 'Teach yourself, teach everyone his real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.' Swamiji's call for evolution of self-conscious activity is indeed the evolution of righteousness in the heart. When there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in character. When there is beauty in character, there is harmony at home. When there is harmony at home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world. Hence let us work for the evolution of the enlightened citizen, which is the mission of Swamiji. Such enlightened citizens should have a strong body and indomitable spirit as advocated by Swamiji in order to 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.' The goal is a prosperous India with peace in itself and giving it to the whole world. Let this complex be an important focal point for radiating such thoughts and actions! It gives me a great pleasure to inaugurate the Cultural Centre. I am sure that the people who visit this place will draw immense inspiration from here. I have a desire that the inspiration and happiness of visiting this place should also be felt and enjoyed by those who are not fortunate enough to visit this place. I suggest that the Ramakrishna Mission and those who maintain this heritage complex should create a digital archive and a high-resolution, virtual walk-through and make it available to the whole world, for Swamiji is one of the most cherished leaders who belong to the whole world. *

Politics, Religion and Vivekananda

SWAMI SANDARSHANANANDA

The Pale of Politics

Swami Vivekananda could not be held in the crucible of politics. His heart expanded limitlessly because of his spiritual accomplishments. Therefore, the idea of containing him within the pale of politics is frivolous. Politics plays offensively, and often, reduces men to brutes, who, according to Swamiji, 'in the name of politics rob others and fatten themselves by sucking the very life blood of the masses'.¹ This opprobrious remark is undeniable, given the widespread plunder of politics perceptible today. In fact, it is the same old story of struggle between the haves and the have-nots repeated perennially, though the former are only a handful yet enormously powerful because of their wealth. Contrarily, though the latter are numerous they are astoundingly weak because of their poverty. Politics thrives on this divide. But Swamiji envisages its extinguishment by effecting reformation in man's attitude towards his brother. Swamiji loses faith in politics as he considers it partial as well as perfidious. Hence, he sedulously repudiates this dubious sport, which infuses a contemptuous contest, inducing mankind to a nasty race that generally ends up in pandemonium and peril.

Swamiji expresses his angst thus: 'To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. Where we differ is in the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction.' (3.213) Needless to mention, he includes politicians also among his 'reformers' who are playing havoc under the pretext of doing good to others. How horrific is the situation created by them now is a matter of common knowledge when the hobgob-

lins of terror are relentlessly gyrating to their hearts' content in broad daylight, turning this beautiful earth into a hell. Simultaneously, the political process adopted to stem their atrocity is similarly abominable and repulsive. Is there anything wrong then if one abhors such a ghastly scene and counts politics ominous? Swamiji is for the awakening of goodness and alleviation of diabolism. He believes that there cannot be any prosperity giving short shrift to our moral development, and that the so-called 'Learning and wisdom are superfluities, the surface glitter merely, but it is the heart that is the seat of all power.' (6.425) 'One must admit that law, government, politics are phases, not final in any way. There is a goal beyond them where law is not needed.' (5.193)

It is not, however, difficult to draw Swamiji in a profile and borrow from his thought to feed political ideologies, for his is an all-encompassing philosophy put to practice by his own organization, which has, evidently, fetched propitious results. For instance, when he says that his 'mission is for the destitute, the poor, and the illiterate peasantry and labouring classes, and if, after everything has been done for them first, there is spare time, then only for the gentry' (6.427) he somewhat resembles the socialistic idea that prescribes a violent revolution for the achievement of its goal, which, of course, he refuses to accept. His method is quite the opposite as his choice lies in a process of the inner growth of man. And he is convinced that there is a science for the improvement of the lot of man which is available in religion, 'the greatest and the healthiest exercise that human mind can have' (2.66) since it is his 'constitutional necessity'. (1.318) Swamiji deems religion a 'practical science' because 'it is being and becoming, it is realization'. (2.43) He

wants to utilize the truth of equality preached in the Vedanta, for it alone, he thinks, can remove discrimination between man and man. Accordingly, he has given us a Universal Religion on the basis of its altruistic principle that can establish an egalitarian society in an ambience of love, 'the only law of life', (6.320) which is miserably missing from our midst because of the foul play of politics, where man does not hesitate even to cut his brother's throat for pelf and profligacy.

Religion Is No Mystery

An in-depth study of history reveals to Swamiji that 'there is no mystery in religion', (3.278) and it 'is of deeper importance than politics since it goes to the root, and deals with the essential of conduct'. (5.200) Thus he gives vent to his feeling:

Now, in my little experience I have collected this knowledge—that for all the devilry that religion is blamed with, religion is not at all in fault: no religion ever persecuted men, no religion ever burnt witches, no religion ever did any of these things. What then incited people to do these things? Politics, but never religion; and if such politics takes the name of religion whose fault is that? (4.125)

'Man is a compound of animality, humanity, and divinity.' (5.417) The purpose of religion is to manifest the divinity, doing away with the other two debilitating traits in him that usher jealousy 'so mysteriously'. (6.145) There is no riddle in religion; it 'permeates the whole of man's life, not only the present, but the past, present, and future'. (4.209) His ideal, the strength of which lies in its reality, 'is to see God in everything', who is the highest evolved state of man's moral and spiritual existence. Swamiji therefore says, 'God has created me and I have created God.' (7.29) He defines both compendiously in one single sentence: 'Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere but the centre is located in one spot; and God is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere.'

(2.33) He thus draws a striking identity between man and God, ascribing subjectivity to the former and objectivity to the latter, both being one Reality. He is not ready to call us religious unless we realize this and 'begin to see God in men and women', (2.326) extending our services towards the poor and downtrodden in an attitude of worship.

The sublimation of work in this manner is Swamiji's signal contribution to human culture, which could be shared by all peoples. He is extremely catholic and freely distributes for our welfare the gems of his invaluable reflection with an unbridled passion. He comments:

In India we have social communism, with the light of Advaita—that is spiritual individualism—playing on and around it; in Europe you are socially individualists, but your thought is dualistic, which is spiritual communism. Thus the one consists of socialistic institutions, hedged in by individualistic thought, while the other is made up of individualist institutions, within the hedge of communistic thought.²

Such an impeccable assessment is possible only by intellectual giants of his attainment as they can rise above all worldly predilections and see things in their right perspective.

The Ill Plaguing Society

Any government, whether liberally democratic or conservatively totalitarian, is found to have achieved only limited success vis-à-vis the actual need. Why? Because the politicians involved in it revel in corruption and show a blithe lack of concern for the people at grass-roots level. Financial dishonesty is almost endemic now. The infighting fuelled by the greed for more power and authority also turns them away from a little goodness left in them. And what to speak of cunning criminalization of some leaders at the helm, blatantly condoned by the jugglery of support of the majority in parliament. Swamiji exhorts us, 'Give up that hateful malice, that dog-like bickering and barking at one another, and take your stand on good purpose, right means, righteous courage

and be brave. When you are born a man, leave some indelible mark behind you.³ He urges us to understand if man makes laws or laws make man, whether money makes man or man makes money. He says, 'This life is a tremendous assertion of freedom; and this obedience to law, carried far enough, would make us simply matter—either in society, or in politics, or in religion. Too many laws are a sure sign of death.' (5.287)

The 'politics of religion' is born of priestcraft. Perhaps, such subtle and cruel persecution is not possible by any other means! Swamiji's abhorrence towards it is traceable to the fact that it perpetuates the worst kind of exploitation. An inordinate enjoyment of privilege turns priests into devils. He was therefore eloquent against them since society during his time was badly ridden with castes, a few brahmins oppressing the majority belonging to lower castes. For that, they had devised methods to monopolize power and authority. His crusade was, in fact, against an evil practice that was weakening the social fabric very fast. If we look at it from the angle of a concept, we will observe that it is universally applicable in terms of exploitation as well as corruption. As for example, some present-day politicians, who are very well comparable with the priests of earlier days. They are, so to say, clerics in their new avatars. An incursion by them into the realm of religion and a tricky handling of its believers win them fabulous favours, about which others can hardly imagine. And, in the process, the catastrophe courted by the devils in them is irreparable. The stream of invectives they let loose with political motives exerts an intense psychedelic influence on their followers. Their sloppy and self-serving speeches never fail to incite terrorism among the immature youth of their herds, who indulge in self-immolation in a frenzy of obfuscation, without caring much what it is for.

Swamiji says that 'the idea of privilege is the bane of life'. (1.423) Then he proceeds with an analysis:

Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste, and the other breaking caste; in other words, the one making for privilege, and the other breaking down privilege. And whenever privilege is broken down, more and more light and progress come to a race. This struggle we see all around us. Of course there is first the brutal idea of privilege, that of the strong over the weak. There is the privilege of wealth. If a man has more money than another, he wants a little privilege over those who have less. There is a still subtler and more powerful privilege of intellect; because one knows more than others, he claims more privilege. And the last of all, and the worst, because the most tyrannical, is the privilege of spirituality. If some persons think they know more of spirituality, of God, they claim a superior privilege over everyone else. (1.423)

Religion in the real sense teaches equality. Swamiji believes that if we are all essentially one there is no room in it for being 'high' and 'low'. Priests cannot make much of a church, preaching this idea of oneness of man. Hence they place themselves on a high pedestal and cast their spell of superiority on the rest. Swamiji's remark is comparatively more incisive about them. He condemns them saying,

And, above all, if the pride of spirituality enters into you, woe unto you. It is the most awful bondage that ever existed. Neither can wealth nor any other bondage of the human heart bind the soul so much as this. ... In what sense are you pure? The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How can there be difference? It is all one. ... If you can see that, good, if not, spirituality has yet to come to you. (1.429)

He wanted to release us from the curse of caste and community, and establish a social order comfortably poised on the principle of democratic distribution of material resources as well as privileges. Unfortunately, the card of caste and community is still being vigorously played by politicians in order to win elections, undermining the unity of the nation. Even those who always chant the mantra of equality, the Marxists, are culpable of this short-

coming. To define socialism is indeed difficult. So it has been understood in various ways by various people. The corruption it is concerned about, accordingly, could not be removed in spite of the application of absolute authority in conformity with its ideology. Its weakness lies in the fact that it is absorbed only in the economic development of man, without bothering the least about human mind and spirit. Professor Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, a well-known scholar, makes a study of this condition:

Socialism, made popular in the modern world by Saint Simon (1760-1825), Fourier (1772-1832) and Robert Owen (1804-1892), is a tricky concept of which no one has been able to give an acceptable definition. 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs,' said Marx, but Lenin replaced it by 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.' Bernard Shaw rejects both the formulas. 'To each according to his needs' would produce the man of whom Shaw drew a typical portrait in Alfred Doolittle, who represents the 'undeserving poor'; he eats as much as any deserving person and drinks a lot more. The objection to Lenin's formula is that it is impossible to make an equitable assessment of work; secondly, it would multiply classes and sharpen class distinctions. Shaw argues that the only alternative left is that all should be paid equally in a social state. But as this tendency is gaining ground, we find that it is a 'disincentive', and production is likely to suffer if energy and initiative are not adequately rewarded.⁴

Swamiji was aware that the world was changing based on the philosophy of socialism through experimentation, but it was not to be the ultimate remedy since it harboured deficiency in its very foundation. He therefore called it 'half a loaf' and asked us to remain on the alert so that human culture did not slide down from the sublime to the ridiculous because of a sudden rise of the long deprived.

The Search for Remedy

More than a hundred years ago, in 1897, Swamiji visualized thus:

Even in politics and sociology, problems that were national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day.⁵

But, the much vaunted globalization of today does not seem to be poor-friendly either. Although its aim is economic integration of the world, it has, nevertheless, failed to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. The poor are found to be where they were before while the rich have become richer as its result, ever widening the hiatus among the two and, thereby, failing to pull out millions (350 million in this country alone) from below the poverty line. Every fourth farmer in the world is an Indian who is sinking into degradation because of wrong policy and diminished feeling of concern for him. Thus all our endeavours and visions are fading away because we are not yet able to come to grips with a useful means of economic reformation. Unless the condition of this essential section of society improves there is no hope for our true progress. Swamiji was in favour of giving a lift to the poor from where they are stationed in society. He fixed a standard of assistance to them that is inversely proportional to the amount of help provided to the privileged. That is, the former should be given more succour than the latter for the untold miseries they have gone through for centuries. Continuing in this manner for some time, he hoped to bring about uniformity in the enjoyment of privileges, annihilating all sorts of distinction.

Here it may be remembered that Jesus of Nazareth too, like any other mortal, was confronted by temptation after his spiritual enlightenment, during his forty days in the desert. He fought 'all the crafty skill of the Power of Evil' within and emerged victorious, applying his strength of divine restraint. He was terribly famished because of the practice of severe austerity. He could have conveniently used the

occult power he had achieved to procure food to appease his physical appetite. But he deliberately avoided it, setting the example that to have mastery over the tyranny of flesh is to be morally strong. He served a very significant lesson to humanity saying, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'⁶ He proved that man is not an instinctive being to get stuck in the mire of the senses, and that the privileges given him by the Almighty to enjoy are not exclusively for his personal use. His revolt against priestcraft in Jerusalem is a phenomenon that established religion above the mass of rituals once more after Buddha. Swamiji says that the history of mankind is the history of a few men of extraordinary courage and confidence like Jesus, Buddha and Ramakrishna, who realized God and laid the foundation for human progress by their life's essence. We suffer most when we lose sight of it, being oblivious of the culture of our spirit.

The fashion of the day is to remain agnostic and secular. This type of behaviour does not add to our rationality. Secularism does not mean ignorance of religion. Rather, it means to be truly religious and not making religion a political tool for abuse. Swamiji's prophetic vision in this regard leads him to declare:

Yet it seems to be true that the solidarity of the human race, social as well as religious, with a scope for infinite variation, is the plan of nature; and if the line of least resistance is the true line of action, it seems to me that this splitting up of each religion into sects is the preservation of religion by frustrating the tendency to rigid sameness, as well as the clear indication to us of the line of procedure.

Politics is expected to mitigate the miseries of the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. Ironically, it has multiplied confusion, complexity and conflict instead. It has made us submit before matter and put our freedom at stake at the altar of physical science. We have been made slaves to technological opulence. Swamiji points out at the event of this crisis:

'Great indeed are the manifestations of muscular power, and marvellous the manifestations of intellect expressing themselves through machines by the appliances of science; yet none of these is more potent than the influence which spirit exerts upon the world.' (3.137) A perfect teacher is an invincible warrior. He moves against the current and gives a vigorous shake to man and society. His need is felt mostly 'when money comes to be worshipped as God, when might is right and men oppress the weak'. Earlier there was no human society, and maybe there will not be any even later. Hence the present is a passing phase towards a higher evolution. Therefore, any law 'derived from society alone cannot be eternal'. Serving this idea, Swamiji prods our conscience and says, 'Your talks of politics, of social regeneration, your talks of money-making and commercialism—all these will roll off like water from a duck's back. This spirituality, then, is what you have to teach the world.' (3.149)

But how could we do good to ourselves in our own nation? To Swamiji every speck of dust of this country is holy, not because it is his motherland, but because it is the land of religion and introspection. He believes that if India dies all rational and noble thinking will disappear from earth, all life-giving ideas will be lost forever and the world will become a still worse place to live in. He wants our country to be flooded with the 'wonderful truths' contained in our ancient literatures, so that people could build their character in their light. He says, 'Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.' (3.221) The gift that our ancestors have left for us in the legacy of their thoughts is the most covetable treasure, if only we are able to judge its real value. They never bothered about communities and colours while offering their wisdom in the Upanishads. Anyone who is competent may inculcate it at his will and be blessed. Swamiji cherishes the desire of making it the common property of all. As he tries to do so in the East, so also does he

endeavour to accomplish it in the West. He says from his own experience:

I could not preach religion in England without showing the wonderful political changes the Vedanta would bring. So, in India, social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring; and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality.' (3.220-1)

He has first-hand knowledge of the mental as well as the physical condition of our people, from which he knows that their lifeline is religion and religion alone, of which love of God is the basic constituent, and he urges them to realize its truth in man. He himself worships the only God whom the ignorant call man. He holds that 'no amount of force, or government, or legislative cruelty will change the condition of a race, but it is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better'. (3.182) His every word is surcharged with inspiration for emancipation. We ought to know how to be nourished by the essence of his message.

The Pathfinder

Many believe that Swamiji's ideas can change the world. For instance, Christopher Isherwood asks us to note the fact that 'Vivekananda's revolution, Vivekananda's nationalism, were not the kind of revolution, not the kind of nationalism, which we associate with other great leaders, admirable and noble as they may be. Vivekananda was far greater than that. In fact, when one sees the full range of his mind, one is astounded.'⁸ He says, moreover, that Swamiji's 'was not nationalism in the smaller sense, it was a kind of supernationalism, a kind of internationalism sublimated'. (53) Likewise, the well-known Indologist Prof A L Basham makes a serious study of Swamiji's works and observes that 'in centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world'. (59) Appraisals such as these will not go futile, for Swa-

miji's influence is unobtrusively and speedily percolating through the crusts of countries, communities and cultures as a blessing unseen. He was a realized soul. Hence his knowledge was of the highest order, which, when applied, is bound to fructify. In his own words, 'spiritual knowledge can only be given in silence like the dew that falls unseen and unheard, yet bringing into blossom masses of roses.'⁹ The insane control of human and financial resources by politics is condemnable. If we choose to follow Swamiji we are sure to have a total transformation of our nature under his tutelage and become free of the blemishes infused into us by politics.

Politics is not, however, an out-and-out a bad thing, especially while its practitioners give it a meaningful turn, resorting to true religion and pathfinders like Swamiji. How could we, otherwise, get stalwarts like Ashoka, Lincoln, Gandhiji, Netaji, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela within its fold, who cared so little about themselves but so much for the masses?

'One's Own Salvation and the Welfare of the World'

Swamiji never wanted monks to participate in active politics, for non-resistance is the principle on which their life is laid down. But never did he like that the same thing should be followed by householders. He expected that they should resist the injustice and harm done to them. If politics is pursued with a view to doing good to humanity, with pure and clean hearts, his heart goes with the politicians. When politics harbours compassion by dint of the spiritual qualities of its proponents, it delivers the goods in spite of the hassle of its inherent complexity. The world will, for sure, change if we sincerely try to 'manifest the Divinity within by controlling [our] nature, external and internal', adopting whatever means we deem suitable for us, knowing that 'doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details'. (1.124)

That is how one becomes religious in the real sense, makes renunciation and service one's motto of work and benefits society. 'No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.' (5.222-3)

The Ideal for India's Regeneration

The indomitable passion for possession is the disastrous ill that is strongly acting over politics as a menace of attrition. In order to get it free from this arcane malady we require an intense exercise of our souls, which is available in true religion, which is eternal and independent of time and space. And this is the whole contention of Swamiji's work and message. But, to regenerate the nation, he thinks we have to rally round a life that has personified the essence of such a religion:

Political ideals, personages representing political ideals, even social ideals, commercial ideals, would have no power in India. We want spiritual ideals before us, we want enthusiastically to gather round grand spiritual names. Our heroes must be spiritual. Such a hero has been

given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round this name. ... One thing we are to remember [is] that it is the purest of all lives that you have seen, or let me tell you distinctly, that you have ever read of. And before you is the fact that it is the most marvellous manifestation of soul-power that you can read of, much less expect to see. (3.315) *

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A student goes to Mulla Nasruddin, a Sufi master, with a bundle of dresses and says, 'O divine master, I want happiness.' Mulla looks at the young man, slowly gets up, snatches his bundle and starts running. Perplexed, the student runs after him to retrieve the bundle. Mulla swiftly runs through the lanes and by-lanes of the place, while the unhappy student helplessly runs after him. Mulla returns to the original spot and sits down innocently, with a bundle beside him. Shortly, the student comes panting after him. Mulla gives him back the bundle and says, 'Here is happiness.'

The student came to Nasruddin in search of happiness. Nasruddin made him miserable by snatching his bundle. He gave it back to him after a while, which made the student happy. What was the real cause of his happiness? The bundle? That is how we feel in life: happiness comes from this or that object. But true happiness comes from within.

—from cyberspace

A Brief Introduction to India's Sacred Oral Tradition

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

With the Hindus ... the old questions of whence, why and whither fascinate and enthrall their thoughts from the time of the Vedic Rishis to the present day. Remarkable as this may sound, we have really no record of any period of Hindu thought of which we can say definitely that it was wanting in the highest and most strenuous thought, from the time of the riddle-hymn of Dirghatamas and the creation-hymn, to the modern Vedantins and Paramahansas of the type of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.' — Maurice Bloomfield¹

Eternal, immortal and infinite Truth is the all-transcendent Being. It is the unrelated, unattached substratum of all visible objects. Human language is fitted to the world of difference and relativity. The same Impersonal Reality when seen through time, space and causality is known to us as the all-pervading Personal God. With regard to the Indian temperament that dwells on the Impersonal Entity, Max Müller says, 'The transcendent temperament acquired no doubt a more complete supremacy in the Indian character than anywhere else.'²

India's Supreme Knowledge Is Older than Her Revealed Sacred Literature

The *Rig Veda* marks the dawn and zenith of eternal wisdom. It is the root of the Tree of Knowledge. As Max Müller says, 'There is nothing more ancient than the Hymns of the *Rigveda*.' The Vedas represent a body of supreme Knowledge, revealed from time to time in the minds of very pure souls called rishis, or seers. India's sacred literary treasures verily hint at an entire body of knowledge more an-

cient than the sacred scriptures themselves: the shruti. The word *shruta* means, 'what was heard from the immediately preceding teachers'. Shruti is revealed transcendent Knowledge (*apauruṣheya*), transmitted orally over a long line of succession from teacher to disciple, which is traced to Brahman, the Absolute Reality. In other words, this succession of memory is traced to the Supreme Being Himself or the eternally existing *śabda*. The authority of the shruti is therefore paramount.

'The universe, consisting of gods and others arises from the Word,' it has been declared by the Vedas from the earliest days.³ 'The Word precedes creation.'⁴ 'Vāk (the Word) is coextensive with Brahman.'⁵ According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe. As subsidiary to the efficient cause, the Word is included in the instrumental cause. As the immediate source of creation *vāk* is called *śabda* Brahman or *nāda* Brahman (literally, 'Sound-Brahman'), which is also an epithet of the Vedas.⁶ Swami Vivekananda says:

Creation proceeded out of the Vedas. ... Veda means the sum total of eternal truths; the Vedic Rishis experienced those truths; they can be experienced only by seers of the supersensuous. ... Veda is of the nature of *Shabda* or of idea. It is but the sum total of ideas. *Shabda*, according to the old Vedic meaning of the term, is the subtle idea, which reveals itself by taking the gross form later on. So owing to the dissolution of the creation the subtle seeds of the future creation become involved in the Veda. ... All the created objects began to take concrete shape out of the *Shabdas* or ideas in the *Veda*. For in *Shabda* or idea, all gross objects have their subtle forms. Creation had proceeded in the same way in all

previous cycles or Kalpas. This you find in the Sandhyā Mantra of the Vedas: 'The Creator projected the sun, the moon, the earth, the atmosphere, the heaven, and the upper spheres in the same manner and process as in previous cycles. ...

The Shabda-state of every object is its subtle state, and the things we see, hear, touch or perceive in any manner are the gross manifestations of entities in the subtle or Shabda state. Just as we may speak of the effect and its cause. Even when the whole creation is annihilated, the Shabda, as the consciousness of the universe or the subtle reality of all concrete things, exists in Brahman as the cause. At the point of creative manifestation, this sum total of causal entities vibrates into activity, as it were, and as being the sonant, material substance of it all, the eternal, primal sound of 'Om' continues to come out of itself. And then from the causal totality comes out first the subtle image or Shabda-form of each particular thing and then its gross manifestation. Now that causal Shabda, or word-consciousness, is Brahman, and it is the Veda. ...

Even if all ... in the universe were to be destroyed, the idea or Shabda ... would still exist ... [and] must be revealed if the idea of it rises in Brahman, which is perfect in its creative determinations. ... At the point of creation Brahman becomes manifest as Shabda (Idea) and then assumes the form of 'Nāda' or 'Om'.⁷

The Grammarians, who adored language, accepted an imperishable, eternal substratum of sound, which was called *spṛṣṭa*, out of which perishable utterances and sounds emanate. The authority of the shruti is therefore paramount. It is revealed knowledge and divine in its source. Max Müller says:

As we can feel that there is electricity in the air, and that there will be a storm, we feel, on reading the Upanishads, that there is philosophy in the Indian mind, and that there will be thunder and lightning to follow soon. Nay, I should even go a step further. In order to be able to account for what seem to us mere sparks of thought, mere guesses at truth, we are

driven to admit a long familiarity with philosophical problems before the time that gave birth to the Upanishads which we possess.⁸

Hinduism, The Sublime and Variegated Result of India's Mnemonic and Oral Traditions

Hinduism, therefore, may also be thought of as the spiritual and philosophical result of a powerful, eternal, vivifying force of inspiration that has immortal vitality. From her vast, composite culture emerged India's sacred treasures of spiritual thought: the Upanishads, Buddhist philosophy, Hindu theism and the bhakti religious orders, along with India's insight of the sacredness of all life. Buddhism, Jainism and most forms of Brahmanism gave great emphasis to this understanding of ahimsa, non-violence, which was so amply expressed in active charity that it reinvigorated the withered soul of inhabitants throughout the greater part of Asia.

No other culture has approached the sublime nature and speculations of Hindu thought. Humanity continues to live in the endless wake of a huge swell of curiosity on the part of the ancient Aryans. They were impelled with an irrepressible spiritual urge to discover *that* which gives rise to existence and meaning to life's endeavours. They were equally impelled to disseminate abroad the truths that were revealed to them in their inner search. Hindu cultural expansion took place not by conquest but by assimilation and inclusiveness based on the spirit of harmony. The evolution of mankind rests upon the response of India's

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hoary saints and sages to the eternal call of the Divine: 'Arise! Awake! Seek the goal and be free.' India has ever sought to civilize the world by conquering it with spiritual force. This spiritual outlook of Hinduism is nurtured by 'the vision of the seers, the vigil of the saints, the speculation of the philosophers and the imagination of the poets.'

There are three most prominent characteristics of India's variegated culture and social life. *First, India is a multiracial, multilingual and multi-religious country.* Despite its apparent and baffling diversity, Indian culture has organic unity. The great historian Vincent Smith observed in his *Oxford History of India*, 'India beyond all doubt possesses a deep, underlying fundamental unity, far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political superiority. That unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners, and sect.'⁹

Professor Clement Webb noticed the overall unity as well. In a tidal wave-like expression, Webb also noted that universality and utterly sublime detachment are reconciled in Hinduism:

With its traditions of periodically repeated incarnations of the Deity in the most diverse forms, its ready acceptance of any and every local divinity or founder of a sect or ascetic devotee as a manifestation of God, its tolerance of symbols and legends of all kinds, however repulsive or obscene, by the side of the most exalted flights of world-renouncing mysticism, it could perhaps more easily than any other faith develop, without loss of continuity with its past, into a universal religion which would see in every creed a form suited to some particular group or individual, of the universal aspiration after one Eternal Reality, to whose true being

the infinitely various shapes in which it reveals itself to or conceals itself from men are all alike indifferent.¹⁰

Second, it has a tremendous inner vitality that allows it to assimilate and adjust. Third, it possesses the unimaginable, inherent power to continue to withstand with renewed vigour innumerable obstacles that present themselves as India marches onward to fulfil its destiny. The Indian mind, its aims and aspirations, its thought and the literature it has produced have been powerfully influenced by the spiritual wisdom recorded in the Sanskrit language. For underlying the Sanskrit language is the singular truth that Sanskrit is more than merely a language: it is the actual embodiment of Pure Consciousness. Each character, each mark, is a mark of the spiritually motivating power of the Divine contained within it. This enables Sanskrit to convey and impart the ancient spiritual truths to the human intellect and to awaken that intellect with its pure radiance. Verily, Sanskrit possesses India's entire philosophy and culture of Truth. The life and development of the Sanskrit language is unique and unparalleled in the world. Long before it came into being, its seeds lay deep in the Aryan soil of India. Following an era of great spiritual and intellectual ferment Indian thought began to appear as the six philosophical systems that are recognized today.

In *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Max Müller writes:

It was this treasure of ancient religious thought which the sages of the Upanishads inherited from their forefathers, and we shall now have to see what use they made of it, and how they discovered at last the true relation between what we call the Divine or the Infinite, as seen objectively in nature, and the Divine or the Infinite as

perceived subjectively in the soul of man. We shall then be better able to understand how they erected on this ancient foundation what was at the same time the most sublime philosophy and the most satisfying religion, the Vedanta.¹¹

Hinduism, therefore, may also be thought of as the spiritual and philosophical result of a powerful, eternal, vivifying force of inspiration that has immortal vitality.

The discovery of Indian literature, and more particularly of Indian religion and philosophy, was likewise the recovery of an old and the discovery of a new world; and even if we can throw but a passing glance at the treasures of ancient thought which are stored up in Sanskrit literature, we feel that the world to which we belong has grown richer, nay, we feel proud of the unexpected inheritance in which all of us may share.¹²

India's Spiritually Motivated Oral Tradition

The most remarkable fact that gives us an insight into the profundity and power of Indian spiritual culture is the foundation of her literary tradition upon an oral tradition that existed for over three thousand years prior to the written Sanskrit works.¹³ Before the advent of Buddhism, writing for literary purposes was virtually unknown in India. Yet, all the valuable wisdom contained in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the epics, as well as other Sanskrit works, was transmitted by a special class of dedicated scholars through the oral tradition. This great tradition was meticulously maintained by a long line of teachers and their sincere, adept disciples. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the two Indian epics, were probably written during the Buddhistic period.

The pristine influence of Sanskrit literature reaches into the present. In 'Human Interest of Sanskrit Literature', a lecture he delivered at the University of Cambridge, Max Müller said:

Let us look at the facts. 'Sanskrit literature' is a wide and vague term. If the Vedas, such as we now have them, were composed about 1500 BC, and if it is a fact that considerable works continue to be written in Sanskrit even now, we have before us a stream of literary activity extending over three thousand four hundred years. With the exception of China

there is nothing like this in the whole world.

It is difficult to give an idea of the enormous extent and variety of that literature. We are only gradually becoming acquainted with the untold treasures which still exist in manuscripts, and with the titles of that still larger number of works which must have existed formerly, some of them being still quoted by writers of the last three or four centuries. The Indian government ... ordered a ... bibliographic survey of India ... where collections of Sanskrit manuscripts are known to exist. ... Some ... catalogues have been published, and we learn from them that the number of separate works in Sanskrit, of which manuscripts are still in existence, amounts to about 10,000. This is more, I believe, than the whole classical literature of Greece and Italy put together. ... The true history of the world must always be the history of the few; and as we measure the Himalaya by the height of Mount Everest, we must take the true measure of India from the poets of the Veda, the sages of the Upanishads, the founders of the Vedanta and Sankhya philosophies, and the authors of the oldest law-books.¹⁴

In *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Dr S N Dasgupta writes of the unique antiquity of the Vedas, which belong to no age or author, for the origin of the Vedic Age is lost in obscurity, enshrouded in the dim, distant past:

When the Vedas were composed, there was probably no system of writing prevalent in India. But such was the scrupulous zeal of the Brahmins, who got the whole Vedic literature by heart by hearing it from their preceptors, that it has been transmitted most faithfully to us

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through the course of the last three thousand years or more with little or no interpolations at all.¹⁵

Dasugpta's comments were long ago authenticated by A A MacDonnell in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* in 1899: 'The Vedas are still learnt by heart as they were long before the invasion of Alexander, and could now be restored from the lips of religious teachers if every manuscript or printed copy of them were destroyed.'¹⁶

It is not the antiquity of the Vedas but their perennial appeal and efflorescence in the Indian mind that is important. For it is really a wonder that this vital tradition has never been disturbed by foreign invasions, internal political upheavals, changes in the language, racial admixture and many other impediments of social, economic and political life.

The subtle-most form of Spirit is more substantially real to the human mind than any material form, more tangible than any idea. That is what the Vedic sages knew. Contemporary author and translator Prof Jean Le Mée records his great appreciation of the immortal Vedic lore:

Precious or durable materials—gold, silver, bronze, onyx, or granite—have been used by most ancient peoples in an attempt to immortalize their achievements. Not so, however, with the ancient Aryans. They turned to what may seem the most volatile and insubstantial material of all—the spoken word—and, out of this bubble of air, fashioned a monument which more than thirty, perhaps forty, centuries later stands untouched by time or the elements. For the Pyramids have been eroded by the desert wind, the marble broken by earthquakes, and the gold stolen by robbers, while the Veda remains, recited daily by an unbroken chain of generations, travelling like a great wave

through the living substance of the mind.¹⁷

The Four Vedas

The *Rig Veda* came into being when all the mantras and hymns composed by the early Vedic seers, with their unusual power and grace of expression were gathered together in great collections or Samhitas, namely, the *Rig Veda Samhita*, the *Yajur Veda Samhita*, the *Sama Veda Samhita* and the *Atharva Veda Samhita*. These are known as the four Vedas:

1. The *Rigveda*, divided into ten books (*mandala*) having 1,028 hymns (including 11 supplementary hymns) and consisting of 10,552 stanzas (including 80 supplementary stanzas).
2. The *Yajurveda* (*Vajasaneyi Samhita*, Madhyandina text) divided into 40 chapters, having 1,975 stanzas and prose-units.
3. The *Samaveda*, consisting of 1,875 stanzas—divided into two main sections (*arcika*).
4. The *Atharva Veda*, divided into 20 books (*kandas*) having 730 hymns in 5,987 stanzas and prose-units.¹⁸

The chanting of the Vedas has always been one of carefully reproduced sound modulations recited in a strictly traditional manner to maintain the correct meaning. Vedic scholarship relying on the comprehensive exposition of the fourteenth-century Indian scholar Sayana reveals much about them.

The *Rig Veda* is essentially the foundation of the other three Vedas and has been described by the British Vedic scholar Jeanine Miller as 'a highly important religious and literary document', as well as 'a work of art and a source of inspiration and edification'.¹⁹ In *Vedic India*, Renou wrote of the sublime Vedic Samhitas, the hymns of the *Rig Veda* that are unique in world literature: 'Very many of the hymns are merely strings of formulae, but some, despite all the constraints which weigh

upon them, show remarkable vigour and originality, and classical India never attained the intensity of expression of some of these old poems.'²⁰

The lesser-known French

The chanting of the Vedas has always been one of carefully reproduced sound modulations recited in a strictly traditional manner to maintain the correct meaning.

philosopher M Leon Delbos had the genius to understand the immortal and universal significance of Vedic literature, which by virtue of its perennial source of inspiration to people down the ages made him remark, 'There is no monument in Greece or Rome more precious than the *Rg-Veda*.' Professor A A MacDonnell writes in his *History of Sanskrit Literature* that 'Since the Renaissance, there has been no event of such world-wide significance in the history of culture as the discovery of Sanskrit literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century.' The Vedas, the great storehouse of immortal spiritual wisdom, indeed give us a glimpse of the spiritually oriented social life of the Vedic civilization. MacDonnell wrote, 'The completeness of the picture they give of society as well as of religious thought has no parallel.' Max Müller (1823-1900), the German philosopher and Sanskritist, translated the entire *Rig Veda*. He wrote that the Vedic hymns 'are to us unique and priceless guides in opening before our eyes tombs of thought richer than the royal tombs of Egypt. ... They have their own unique place and stand by themselves in the literature of the world.'²¹ *

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Goodness

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can

In all the ways you can, in all the places you can

At all the times you can, to all the people you can

As long as you ever can.

—John Wesley

Towards Enlightened Citizenship

SWAMI SATYAMANANDA

An individual is the basic social unit. Actually, we cannot think of an individual bereft of social baggage. The mind of each individual has two aspects: objective and subjective. The objective aspect is called society and the subjective is the real person. Truly speaking, the streams of individual and social consciousness blend finely and almost indistinguishably. This blending is present not just in man but in every living being.

Individual and Social Forces

There are many active forces in the individual that go into shaping society. Likewise there are many social forces incessantly working on the individual and also transforming him. It can equally be urged that when magnified, distorted and coloured, the individual forces become social forces. And when focused, the social forces make an individual. All this makes the individual constantly shift and assume different aspects according to changing social scenarios. Hence the so-called individuality keeps growing all the time. The same can be said of society. The question then arises: what is the goal of all these changes and growth?

Interrelationship among Individuals

The instinct to form societies and live in a group is ingrained in the individual psyche or rather in individual biology. But this very instinct or genetic factor throws us against each other to compete for everything. Each individual has a bundle of characteristics that combine to bring out his uniqueness. Even so a society has numerous elements that give it a distinct individuality.

An individual is related to his family, clan, class or caste, economy, education, pro-

fession, race, language, religion, culture, politics, hobbies, nationality, humanity and so on. It is not necessarily in this order or all of these, but it must also be remembered that vices and virtues also lump people together. A person is thus a part of a group, which is a part of a larger group, and so on. The moment a person is born he is born into a group or a subgroup. As the individual grows, the number of groups clustering around him also increases. Thus an individual has growing circles of subgroups and groups around him that act as a protective shell around him, simultaneously hemming him in. It is like a stone thrown in a placid pool. The concentric ripples move away, one giving rise to another. They spread out far and they return after reaching the outer limits (banks). Each concentric circle is a group in which that individual lives and with which he identifies himself.

Suppose this pool does not have just one stone thrown in (an individual) but many. All these concentric ripples now clash with one another as they emerge to spread, and again clash when they return from the outer limits (of society). All this makes the water choppy and unstable. Then the relative sizes of stones (individuals) vary, making their respective ripples varied. Some ripples get strengthened, some impelled, others contained and many destroyed.

Active and Silent Influences

There are times in the lives of individuals when a kind of frenzy tightens its stranglehold on them and threatens their sanity and existence. Every nation and society also undergoes this kind of upheaval in its history. Some nations, like some individuals, endure it longer, others briefly, yet others frequently and

still others disastrously. The various forces that are involved are beyond our control and comprehension. This description fits when the forces are manifest and their effects can be perceived, but mostly these pressing circumstances are silently working on the individual and society, making for constant low-intensity struggle and despair. From one standpoint these struggles are necessary to make the society strong. Again, paradoxically, this saps our strength and with it our happiness and peace.

Group Clashes

Society being a conglomeration of different groups and subgroups, ideally all these should work in unison, but they don't. Just as there are different groups there are different forces operating within groups, moulding and then scattering them broadcast. This causes the inevitable palpable and impalpable clashes with other groups. No society is free from such clash of forces. Sometimes the clash of various forces in different intensities raises some groups, lets down others and crushes some others. But these forces do not absolutely destroy. They fragment a group and cast it away. From these remnants rises yet again another group that combines with the pre-existing ones or asserts its old identity. The disruptive forces thus become cohesive forces. These group wars, manifest and non-manifest, are a necessary component in every society, safeguarding and diffusing group strength all over it. Thus, an individual is a mere straw in the immensity of these movements that constantly traverse social realms.

No Man is an Island

We have got into a maze. Rather, we are already in it. What do we mean when we talk of enlightened citizenship, if we keep the above description of society in mind? The answer is obvious: no man is an island. Being an island might be poetry but bad poetry. The words *monasticism* and *monk* come from *mono*, 'one'. But monks also form monastic commu-

nities and go out for begging their daily bread. A person who is really alone is an insane person. He has gone beyond sanity and also society. Yet this very sane society is seen to make some of its members insane. Where is the ground we stand on? It is all the time shifting. Is this concept of being alone true or false? This concept itself would not have arisen in our minds if it were totally baseless. Here is the other argument: being all the time in a crowd has given rise to an opposite notion of being alone. Generally, people can endure even third-degree torture but not solitary confinement.

Who Is a Leader?

If an individual asserts too much he is disliked and most likely destroyed. If one accommodates oneself to others' wills and whims, one ends up not being oneself. Yet we find individuals who are assertive and still accommodative. They accommodate a group's hopes, aspirations and struggles and then assert themselves. This kind of individual has grown out of limited individuality and has reached the higher social consciousness of the group or groups. Such individuals embody in themselves both aspects of assertion and accommodation in a large measure. They are natural leaders.

It can also be urged that the play of social forces themselves give rise to such individuals. These individuals are the result of those very forces they typify and embody. It is seen that as the particular goal of the group is attained, this leader's purpose is served and he is no longer needed. As a new problem crops up, those very forces that struggle against that problem will throw up a new leader. Are such persons enlightened citizens? The answer is, not necessarily; for it is seen in many cases that 'leaders' are selfish, egotistical, tyrannical and paranoid about power. Is an individual, then, tucked away in some obscure corner living a small life as an enlightened citizen? The answer again is in the negative. Yet, being an en-

lightened citizen does not depend upon wealth, brains, power, culture, education, sectarian beliefs or any other factor.

Maintaining Poise by Living for an Ideal

If anyone observed closely how ballet dancers or gymnasts manage to keep their balance and not feel giddy while whirling rapidly, he would realize that their eyes are riveted on a distant spot on the wall or the ceiling. This eliminates the disorientation and keeps them balanced.¹ Similarly when an individual keeps his sight on the ideal, far above society's turbulence, he is not toppled by the natural and sordid social forces that try to disturb his equanimity and poise. This ideal has to be spiritual, for only the spiritual is above the material forces and is not subject to them. As the individual keeps his vision on the ideal, the orientation towards it commences and then inexorably impels him towards it. For it is ordinarily seen that our eyes lock into an object and impel the body to follow.

Those who are not inclined towards a spiritual ideal can anchor themselves to a lesser yet noble ideal: looking upon people generalized as humanity. Humanity is naturally above particular societies. As people strive for their rights and duties and a decent life, they will inevitably learn that in order to rise higher, humanity must at one point be able to transcend human bonds. The Atman, which is the divine core of human personality and 'the Truth of truth' (*satyasa satyam*),² then becomes our ideal. Its high expression is in humanity and the highest is in all creation.

It is this ideal, the Atman, that is faintly reflected and perceived in our subjective and objective consciousness of individuality and society. This Atman is actually the motive power, the real force above all the other forces that toss us about in order to guide us to Its portals.

True Individuality in the Atman

It is not that we shall go about staring up at the skies, as that would erroneously mean we are directing our vision above society. It will be actually having our mental vision directed *inside*, for the Spirit, our Soul, is inside. It is on this permanence that we shall stand and view the shifting ground and the play of forces in society. This will be a first step towards seeing the reality within us and then as residing in all beings. We shall then see individuals and society, in fact all of creation, in the wonderful unchanging light of the Atman. Only then will we be perfectly enlightened individuals and perfectly enlightened citizens. Everything will then be harmonious, whole, healthy and meaningful. The smallest to the largest action, individuals, groups and sub-groups will be found to be unconsciously pursuing the spiritual ideal. We shall then work harder, not only for humanity but also for the whole world. Others will then emulate us. The goal of true individuality, the Atman, having been reached, we shall identify with all the centrifugal and centripetal social ripples, and grow and help others to grow in the light of the Atman. *

Notes and References

1. Disorientation of any kind is due to the kinesthetic and vestibular systems. The former is due to nerves spread all over the body and the latter, which works with the former, also detects the position of the head and is essential for maintaining balance. The brain monitors these movements along with those from the eyes to control balance and coordinate movements. The eyes and other senses can compensate to a certain degree for balance. See *ABC's of the Human Mind*, ed. Alma Guinness (New York: Reader's Digest, 1990), 134.
2. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20.

It is better to sleep on what you intend to do than stay awake over what you have done.

A Wonder Triangle

N HARIHARAN

A triangle is a perfect model of concord, cooperation and compatibility. The triangle collapses the moment the three sides violate the geometrical rule and go their own way. The three angles that constitute the triangle have to respect the rules of the game. The aggregate of their angles should always be equal to 180 degrees. This is a geometrical imperative. This imperative can be flouted only at the peril of endangering the triangle to the point of extinction.

There is, however, a unique triangle that breaks this master rule and still manages to survive as a triangle. This triangle is the triangle of the life of Holy Mother. The sides of this un-mathematical triangle are wifedom, nunhood and motherhood. Nunhood flies in the face of wifedom and is incompatible with motherhood. To speak of a nun as being, at once, a wife and a mother is as ridiculous as to speak of a barren woman as having brought forth a son. The coexistence in a woman of nunhood, wifedom and motherhood at one and the same time is a factual impossibility, an arrant nonsense. But the triple *-hoods* admirably harmonize and protect the integrity of the unique triangle of Holy Mother's life.

Wife and Nun in One

How is Holy Mother able to perform the veritable feat of harmonizing the disparate triple angles and crafting out of them an impeccable triangle of life? Of the three angles that make the wonder triangle, the two angles of wifedom and nunhood are implacably hostile to each other. They are constitutionally inca-

pable of coexistence and cooperation. If you are a wife, well, you cannot be a nun. It is as simple as that. Holy Mother knows it fully well. But she knows one more secret that is unknown to the common run of womenfolk. The mystic secret is that a wife can be a nun if the carnal element in wifedom is eliminated. By her immaculately pure life, Holy Mother proves that the essence of wifedom consists not so much in carnal indulgence as in loving service to the spouse. By stripping wifedom of the toxic element of carnality, she invests it with a spiritual dimension and harnesses it for spiritual ends. Wifedom minus carnality expresses itself in her case as a sublime life of in-

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tense penance and self-abnegating service. By her assiduous and sincere service of the Master in his spiritual expedition, by her conscious conception and adoration of him as an embodiment of the Supreme, by her uncanny knack of anticipating even the smallest need and wish of the Master and ministering to it with exemplary solicitude, and by her total self-dedication to his lofty spiritual cause and ideal, Holy Mother makes the emphatic point that she is a model wife par excellence. The remarks of Swami Tapasyanandaji in this context are very remarkable: 'To be of service to the Master was her highest delight. What pained

her sometimes was that she could not get sufficient opportunity to attend on him.¹

Holy Mother tellingly makes the point that she is an uncompromising nun by firmly saying no to a possible call of carnality. To the pointed question of the Master whether she had come to drag him into the ugly pit of carnality and the meshes of maya, Holy Mother said emphatically that she had come not to pull him down but to be of service to him. The apparent antinomy between wifhood and nunhood is only a fictitious one and is largely caused by the misconception that successful married life is dependent on the physical relationship between the couple. The puzzling paradox of the combination of wifhood and nunhood cannot be placed in the right perspective except by quoting in full the relevant passages from Swami Tapasyanandaji's book:

And withal the most wonderful thing is that this holy couple could set so perfect an example of married love, and yet free from the least taint of corporeal passion. In fact, it is the great lesson of their lives that in the highest specimens of humanity, love is not dependent on sex or any consideration of physical intimacy. Many a modern thinker on questions of sex-life is disposed to separate the life of love from the function of procreation and invest the former with an independent value in itself, in spite of the association one finds between them in nature. Even a Christian writer like Nicholas Berdyaev argues that to make love dependent on, or subordinate

to, procreation is to transfer the principle of cattle breeding to human relation. Many who hold the cultivation of holiness as the highest ideal of life might have agreed with this view if such thinkers had admitted the possibility of transcending the instinctive side of sex in a perfect union of souls. But they are particular in insisting that love between the sexes can never be perfect without physical expression. For example, Edward Carpenter remarks on this subject [*The Dream of Love and Death*]: 'But equally absurd is any attempt to limit (love) ... to the spiritual with a somewhat lofty contempt for the material—in which case it tends ... to become too like trying to paint a picture without the use of pigments. All the phases are necessary, or at least desirable—even if ... a quite complete and all-round relation is seldom realized.'

The conjugal life of the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna contradicts this view and sets another norm, at least for the noblest of mankind. For those in whom consciousness is yet centred in the body, love without sex may be like painting without pigment. But there are men and women who transcend the body-consciousness and realize the Self behind it. If they happen to paint the life of love as an example for humanity, the pigment they use is not sex but the Self. ...

In their case [in the case of the Master and Holy Mother] both stood for a common ideal of great sublimity, each helped to elicit the best that was in the other, and both found perfect satisfaction in mutual service, without the aid of any corporeal passion to hold them together in

love and amity. If one enquires as to what constituted the cementing principle in this perfect union, one arrives at the Self, of which everything else is but a reflection.' (64-6)

No Offspring, yet a Mother

We have seen that of the triple angles, it is the angle of nunhood that mainly skews the triangle. Once it falls in place, the triangle acquires sense. But the angle of motherhood, though not as incongruous as the angle of nunhood, causes its own

True, Holy Mother has no claims to motherhood if we associate it with the physical procreation of children. But her claims to the title of Mother rest on surer foundations than the mere physical begetting of offspring. The progeny of Holy Mother are not a few countable ones born of physical union but an army of them won by her all-embracing, universal love.

problem of reconciliation. The problem, in its stark nakedness, is this: How can Holy Mother, a nun at the core, albeit a wife, be a mother, if by mother we mean a woman who physically produces children? True, Holy Mother has no claims to motherhood if we associate it with the physical procreation of children. But her claims to the title of Mother rest on surer foundations than the mere physical begetting of offspring. The progeny of Holy Mother are not a few countable ones born of physical union but an army of them won by her all-embracing, universal love. Regarding the unique motherhood of Holy Mother, the Master's words are prophetic. Let us hear again what Swami Tapasyanandaji says in this context:

There have been people who have expressed sympathy for the Holy Mother on account of what they consider the barrenness of her married life. For did not the very greatness of her husband stand in the way of her experiencing the substance of matrimonial life, and what is more, the greatest privilege of a woman, namely, motherhood? Indeed, her own mother, Syamasundari Devi, seems to have felt in this way at one time, and remarked in the hearing of Sri Ramakrishna, 'My Sarada has been married to a lunatic. She has not known family life. She has no children. She will never know the happiness of being addressed as "mother".' At this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'Well, mother, you need

Holy Mother's life is an absorbing saga of picturesque paradoxes. First, she is an intensely loving wife without the intimacy of physical union with her godly spouse. Second, she is a true nun without the tag of non-marriage. Third, she is a mother without any offspring in the usual sense.

not worry about that. Your daughter will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as "Mother".' (28)

* * *

To sum up, Holy Mother's life is an absorbing saga of picturesque paradoxes. First, she is an intensely loving wife without the intimacy of physical union with her godly spouse. Second, she is a true nun without the tag of non-marriage. Third, she is a mother without any offspring in the usual sense. It is these triple paradoxes that lend an ethereal charm to her divine life. The triple paradoxes resolve themselves into an abiding reconciliation and concord, once we grasp the basic truth that her holy life, like that of her divine spouse, is fundamentally anchored in the Spirit. *

References

1. Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969), 53.

Some of Holy Mother's disciples were impressed by her motherly solicitude, some by her ability as a teacher to dispel their doubts, and some by her unshakeable reassurance regarding their ultimate salvation, which can be given only by Divinity. But these features must not be compartmentalized. Whenever she appeared as mother, one saw behind her motherhood the power of a teacher, the transmitter of spiritual wisdom. Again, when she acted as a teacher, she was not aloof or severe; she attracted her disciples by her motherly love. Finally, her divine nature supplied the foundation of the other two.

—Swami Nikhilananda

Swami Vivekananda's First Hosts in Bombay: Ramdas Chabildas and Chabildas Lalubhai

SWAMI SHUDDHARUPANANDA

From the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western disciples we learn that Swamiji was in Khandwa towards the end of June 1892.¹ He had stayed there for about three weeks with Babu Haridas Chatterji, a pleader. From his talks with his host there, we come to know of Swamiji's serious intention to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, to be held the following year. Earlier, Swamiji had heard of this religious convention when he was in Kathiawar. The book on the life of Thakur Saheb Jaswant Singhji of Limbdi, which was written in Gujarati and published in 1896, mentions that it was the Maharaja of Limbdi who gave Swamiji the idea of going to the West to preach Vedanta. We learn further from the *Life* that when Swamiji was in Porbandar, Pandit Shankar Pandurang, the dewan of the state, told him, 'Swamiji, I am afraid you cannot do much in this country. Few will appreciate you here. You ought to go to the West, where people will under-

stand you and your worth. Surely you can throw great light upon Western culture by preaching the Sanatana Dharma!' Swamiji was glad to hear these words, for they coincided with his own thoughts, which he had expressed to C H Pandya of Junagadh, though vaguely.²

During this period Swamiji exhibited intense spiritual power, which was corroborated by Swami Akhandanandaji. The latter had met Swamiji around this time in Mandvi, Gujarat. He said that he was astonished to see the change in Swamiji's face, which had a sublime, divine radiance.

Now we can understand why Swamiji told Haridas Babu that if someone helped him with the passage money, he was prepared to go to America. Haridas Babu recognized Swamiji's great personality and wanted him to extend his stay in Khandwa. But Swamiji had to make his pilgrimage to Rameswaram. So he could not extend his stay, nor could he keep

halting at other places. Seeing Swamiji's resolve, Haridas Babu gave a letter of introduction to his brother in Bombay and told Swamiji that his brother would introduce him to Seth Ramdas Chabildas, a well-known barrister there. He then bought for Swamiji a train ticket to Bombay.

The House Where Swamiji Stayed in Bombay

Swamiji reached Bombay in the last week of July 1892. There, Haridas Chatterjee's broth-



Samudra Villa, house of Ramdas Chabildas

er introduced Swamiji to Ramdas Chabildas, who received him cordially and requested him to be his guest. Swamiji agreed.

In his 'Discourses on Jnana Yoga' Swamiji says, 'The higher understanding is extremely difficult. The concrete is more to most people than the abstract.'³ And he cites an illustration in which he gives the description of the house of Ramdas Chabildas, his first host in Bombay. He talks about two men, one a Hindu and the other a Jain, who were playing chess in the rich merchant's home, which was near the sea. (We introduced the above subject to give the reader an idea of the house and its location. For the whole story the reader may refer to the said lecture.)

In January 2003 the present author located the house of Ramdas Chabildas with the help of two descendants of Chabildas Lalubhai. It stands on Dorab Shaw Lane, Napeon Sea Road, Bombay.⁴ Some photographs of the building are included in this article along with their description.

The author found the house in extremely dilapidated condition. Only the front porch was in use, by security guards, who were manning the place on behalf of its present owner, Sri Bilasrai Mahavir Prasad Badriprasad. The house is a three-storeyed building, known as Samudra Villa. Except for the porch all other areas of the house are unsafe for human habitation. Situated beside the sea, it has long balconies on the first and second floors and matches Swamiji's description of it. After a lot of coaxing, the guards allowed the author inside to have a look. The author has some knowledge of architecture and building construction. After analysing the style of construction and the materials used, he feels that the house is more than 150 years old. The ground floor has stables that can accommodate six to eight horses. Stables in a residential building



Samudra Villa: front view

speak of the owner's wealth. At the rear are utilities like toilets and servants' quarters in a separate three-storeyed building. The main house is connected with the utilities at every floor.

This house belonged to Seth Chabildas Lalubhai, who was one of the wealthy merchants of Bombay. We have the sale document of the Samudra Villa, dated April 1916, executed between Kesarbai, wife of Chabildas Lalubhai, and the purchaser, Dorab Shaw Boman-



'Samudra Villa' engraved on façade



Samudra Villa: view of stable

jee Dubash, a Parsee. That explains how the lane got its name.

It would be a good idea if, with permission from the headquarters, the local Ramakri-



Samudra Villa: dilapidated staircase

shna Math arranges to put up a small marble tablet near this bungalow to commemorate Swamiji's stay there during July-August 1892.

Ramdas Chabildas

In 1875 Ramdas Chabildas was a student of Elphinstone School, which has all along been a prestigious institution.⁵ Later he went to England and earned his postgraduate degree in arts around 1884 and then his law degree. On his return to India the government honoured

him with a walking stick with a gold-and-silver handle, for becoming the first Indian barrister. Ramdas Chabildas was also a Sanskrit scholar, well grounded in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Apart from Swamiji, he had hosted at his bungalow eminent spiritual personalities like Swami Dayananda Saraswati. So his house must have resonated with religious debates and discussions.⁶ He was a staunch Arya Samajist and a founder member of its Bombay branch. From Swami Dayananda Saraswati he received training in basic Sanskrit and in composing *kavyas*. On Dayananda Saraswati's demise in 1883, he composed a twenty-one-verse tribute to him in Sanskrit. It is significant that the Arya Samaj of Bombay had about 100 founder members in 1875. Among them Chabildas Lalubhai was prominent.

During Swamiji's two-month stay in his bungalow, Ramdas had numerous discussions with him, one of which has come to light from Mahapurush Maharaj's conversations at the Bombay ashrama on 19 January 1927. Mahapurush Maharaj told the monks that Swamiji had stayed in Ramdas Chabildas' house and visited many places in Bombay. He further said, 'Ramdas Chabildas belonged to the Arya Samaj and was against the worship of God with form. He had much discussion with

Swamiji concerning it. One day he said to Swamiji, "Well, Swamiji, you say that worship of God with forms, idol-worship and such other doctrines are true. If you can prove these doctrines by arguments quoted from the Vedas, I shall leave the Arya Samaj, I promise you." Swamiji replied emphatically, "Yes, surely, I can do that." And he began to explain to Chabildas the Hindu doctrine of image-worship and such other doctrines in the light of the Vedas. Ramdas Chabildas was convinced and made good his promise by leaving the Arya Samaj.'

It seems Ramdas Chabildas was only a few years older than Swamiji; so they gelled. Moreover, they had converging interests: scriptures and Sanskrit. On 22 August 1892, Swamiji wrote to the Dewan of Junagadh, 'I have got here some Sanskrit books and help, too, to read, which I do not hope to get elsewhere, and I am anxious to finish them.'

It appears Swamiji could not visit the Elephanta caves because the monsoon had already set in, preventing launches from plying to Elephanta Island. During the monsoon the Arabian Sea is very rough, choppy and ferocious. However, Swamiji did visit the Kanheri caves near Borivili, a description of which will be given later on in the article. In his unpublished letter dated 22 May 1893 from Bombay, he writes to the Maharaja of Khetri, 'At Bombay I went to see my friend Ramdas, barrister-at-law. He is rather a sentimental gentleman and was [so] much impressed with your highness' character that he told me that had it not been midsummer he would rather fly to see such a prince.'

From Bombay Swamiji went to Poona. At the railway station he was introduced to the renowned scholar and patriot Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was his fellow passenger. Tilak says in his reminiscences, 'At Victoria Terminus a sannyasin entered the carriage I was in. A few Gujarati gentlemen were there to see him off. They made the formal introduction and asked the sannyasin to reside at my



Samudra Villa: crumbling roof

house during his stay at Poona.⁸ We can safely assume that among the group of Gujarati gentlemen were Ramdas Chabildas and Shyamji Krishna Verma, his friend and brother-in-law.

Ramdas Chabildas' Family

After getting his law degree, Ramdas Chabildas started his practice in Bombay. Later, in the late 1880s, he began his practice as barrister in Nagpur.⁹ He purchased a two-acre property at Civil Lines from the Baxi family and built a large bungalow, Jamna Villa, named after his wife Jamnabai.¹⁰ The Baxis were neighbours of Ramdas Chabildas. Ramdas Chabildas had two sons, Suryakant and Jaisen, both barristers. Suryakant died when he was about forty, leaving behind three sons and two daughters. Jaisen practised as a barrister in



Four Generations: (r-l) Chabildas Lalubhai (father), Ramdas Chabildas (son), Suryakant Ramdas (grandson) and Janak Ramdas (great-grandson)

Nagpur and was elected mayor of the city. The Corporation of Nagpur honoured him by naming one of the city's neighbourhoods as Ramdas Peth, after his father. Suryakant's eldest son Janak was a commander in the Indian Navy.

At present, Ramdas Chabildas' property is all sold and his descendants are living mainly in Bombay, except for one in Nagpur. On the said property there still exists a memorial that preserves the relics of Ramdas Chabildas and his wife. Two marble tablets on the memorial say Ramdas Chabildas died on 22 October 1920 and Jamnabai on 10 January 1914.

Chabildas Lalubhai (Ramdas' Father)

Chabildas Lalubhai was born in Bombay in 1839. He was a Suryavanshi Gujarati, a kshatriya belonging to the Chevali Bhansali com-

munity. Bhansalis are descendants of King Bhanusal, who ruled in the north-western part of India. Their family deity is Mother Hinglaj. Hinglaj is a place in Baluchistan (now in Pakistan) popularly known as Marubhumi Hinglaj ('desert Hinglaj'). It is one of the *śakti-pīṭhas* of Mother Sati. A journey to Hinglaj is very difficult due to its hostile terrain. Swami Trigunatitananda had visited this place on pilgrimage.

In later times, the Bhansali community came further down from the north-west, and some of them settled in Kutch, Sorath (Kathiawar), Surat, Sindh and Cheval. So they are called Kutchi, Sorathi, Sindhi and Chevali Bhansalis. Being Gujaratis, the Bhansali community preferred to do business and trade. Chabildas Lalubhai's father was Lalubhai Jairamdas; he was in the British Army.

Chabildas Lalubhai As a Businessman and Builder

At the young age of thirteen years Chabildas Lalubhai joined Messrs Cullar Palmer & Co at their Bombay branch for Rs 15 a month. From the beginning his mind was set on starting his own business. So after gaining some experience he gave up his salaried job, purchased some big country-boats and used them for carrying freight to and from foreign steamers at Bhavcha-Dhakka (Bombay seaport). This enterprise of his was highly successful. Gradually he became one of the foremost business magnates and owned his own steamship named *Galileo* for doing business with foreign companies. *Galileo* was insured for Rs 5 lakh. At that time English cloth was hugely popular and much sought-after throughout the world. Chabildas Lalubhai took advantage of this business boom. He imported English cloth and amassed huge wealth by selling them to

wholesale traders in Bombay. He also had a factory in Jamnagar, Saurashtra, where decorative goods were made from ivory. He exported these and other prime goods to Britain and France. Since he was the first visiting Indian trader to France, the French government honoured him with a letter of recognition.

Chabildas Lalubhai was also highly successful in obtaining building contracts from the government and private parties. Along the Bombay-Poona rail line, from Karjat to Lonavla, where the Khandala Ghats are situated, he secured works connected with the railway line. In Bombay he built a number of buildings. The buildings he erected and owned still exist in Dadar.¹¹

Chabildas Lalubhai's Borivili Bungalow

When Swamiji visited Bombay in 1892 there were trains plying between Colaba and Andheri. Since the Kanheri caves are about 22 km from Bombay it can be presumed that along with Ramdas Chabildas and Chabildas Lalubhai Swamiji may have taken the train from Grant Road (which is nearer to their bungalow) to Andheri and then proceeded to Borivili by horse carriage, or they might have used an eight-horse *shigram* carriage from the Napeon Sea Road bungalow. Chabildas Lalubhai had a spacious bungalow in the western part of Borivili, a suburb 20 km away from the city, along Lokamanya Tilak Road and west of Factory Lane. He had purchased it from Seth Jayram Bhatia. At this bungalow, he used to entertain his British friends and business contacts. From Borivili, the Kanheri caves are very near. Whenever guests arrived, about forty people were hired to light the bungalow with Petromax (gasoline) lights in the evenings and also to carry delicious food to Kanheri, where some sort of picnic lunch was usually arranged. Gamavati Seth, one of the descendants, gave us this information. It is quite possible that Swamiji too may have been lodged in this bungalow for a few



Chabildas Lalubhai

days and similarly entertained.

This Borivili bungalow of Chabildas Lalubhai had marble statues and a garden. It being a Gujarati's bungalow, there was also a huge swing for people to sit on. In the evening many people from surrounding places visited Swamiji to listen to his talks on religion. Chandrakant, a young man who used to come there with his father, was quite inspired. Even after Swamiji's departure, he continued to visit the house daily to pay obeisance to the memory of Swamiji; and this practice he kept up until he was ripe old. When inquisitive people asked him why he saluted the bungalow, he would narrate that when he was young he had had the good fortune of meeting and talking with a radiant, powerful and loving swami.¹²

After Chabildas Lalubhai's death, his wife Kesarbai and their two sons Janmeyjay and Bhadrasen and their families lived in this house. The building does not exist anymore. Some two decades back, Hansaben Goragandhi, daughter of Janmeyjay, inherited the property and demolished the bungalow to raise a



Chabildas Lalubhai with second wife Kesarbai and son Janmeyjay

multi-storeyed apartment building.

Swamiji's Visit to Kanheri Caves

It is highly unlikely that Swamiji and his host would have returned to the Napeon Sea Road bungalow when the latter had a big, spacious bungalow in Borivili. Moreover, Swamiji was no casual visitor. He would have minutely observed and studied each and every cave. He had a deep interest in rock-cut architecture. These caves, numbering more than 100, are among the largest Buddhist caves in western India. Swamiji must have been fascinated to see Caves 1, 2 and 3 for their massive pillars, sculpture and stupa. Perhaps the *chaitya* hall in Cave 3 and the assembly hall in Cave 10 gave him the idea that the *natmandir* (prayer hall) of the future Ramakrishna temple should have such a design concept. Swami Vijnananandaji incorporated this and other ideas of Swamiji in his drawings and plan of the Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math, which was completed in 1938. So it is reasonable to presume that Swamiji might have returned to the caves more than once to study them in depth, because all their details do not lend themselves to serious study in a single visit. They made such a deep impression on him that many years after he had visited the caves, Swamiji spoke of them to his disciples who

had gathered at Thousand Island Park, USA. The wealth of details Swamiji studied at the Kanheri caves is evident from Sister Christine's reminiscences of him:

While he was at Thousand Islands he made plans for future, not only for his disciples in India and the work there, but also for those of his followers in America, who were hoping sometime to go to India. At that time we thought these plans were only day-dreams. One day he said, 'We shall have a beautiful place in India, on an island with the ocean on three sides. There will be

small caves which will accommodate two each, and between each cave there will be a pool of water for bathing, and pipes carrying drinking water will run up to each one. There will be a great hall with carved pillars for the Assembly Hall, and more elaborate Chaitya Hall for worship. Oh! It will be luxury.' It seemed that he was building castles in the air. None of us dreamed that this was something which could ever be realized.¹³

Sister Christine's Visit to Kanheri Caves

Many years later, when Sister Christine visited Bombay, she visited the Kanheri caves. It is interesting to read what she has to say about her visit. She took a train to Borivili and then hired a bullock-cart. When the road had ended, she and the bullock-cart driver had to go on foot. She says:

We went only a short distance and then came to a stream which at that season was almost dried up. On the other side was a small hill. Here we found carved stone steps leading to the top. And what a view there was from the crest of the hill! The ocean on three sides, a forest leading to the water, carved seats on which to rest, sculptured halls of magnificent proportions. Here it all was—the island with the ocean on three sides, a great sculptured Assembly Hall, the Chaitya Hall, ... the small cells, containing two stone beds each, pools of water between the cells, even the pipes to carry water! It was as if a

dream had unexpectedly come true. Coming upon this abandoned site, which answered in detail to the fairytale we had heard long before in America, I was profoundly affected. (217)

When Sister Christine narrated to Swami Sadanandaji her visit to the deserted island of 109 caves, he told her:

Yes, Swamiji in his wanderings in western India before he went to America, found these caves. The place stirred him deeply; for it seems that he had a memory of a previous life in which he lived there. At that time, the place was unknown and forgotten. He hoped that some day he might acquire it and make it one of the centres for the work which he was planning for the future. (218)

Swamiji might have easily acquired the Kanheri caves because he knew that if he asked Ramdas Chabildas to give them to him for his future work, both Ramdas Chabildas and Chabildas Lalubhai would have readily agreed, because it was then one of their properties.

Chabildas Lalubhai's Generosity

Even though Chabildas Lalubhai had amassed immense wealth, he was a devoted and benevolent person at heart. During the plague of 1874, he built shelters on his own land in Goregaon, a suburb of Bombay, for the benefit of the people, who were fleeing the city. Later, during a famine, he provided food, clothing, shelter and every kind of necessity to hundreds of orphans for a whole year. There are around forty-three Ram temples in Bombay built by rich Gujarati businessmen; the one in Gulalwadi was built by Chabildas Lalubhai.¹⁴ In his last will Chabildas Lalubhai mentions the construction of (a) hospital open to all, (b) a sanatorium for Hindus, (c) a lodge for poor Hindus, (d) industrial and technical schools and colleges, and (e) scholarships for students of all communities.



Samudra Villa: sea view

Swamiji and Chabildas Lalubhai

The *Life* has mistaken Ramdas Chabildas and Chabildas Lalubhai for the same person, though they were son and father, respectively. Swamiji refers to Ramdas Chabildas as Mr Ramdas and to Chabildas Lalubhai as Mr Chabildas. The book says Seth Ramdas Chabildas later accompanied Swamiji to Chicago from Yokohama.¹⁵ But, in fact, it was Chabildas Lalubhai who travelled with Swamiji to Japan and then to Chicago and Boston. In the *Life*, we find that 'Mr Chabildas, who had been one of Swami's hosts in Bombay, sailed for Japan by the same ship [*Peninsular*].'¹⁶ In his unpublished letter dated 22 May 1893 to the Mahara-



Samudra Villa: another front view

ja of Khetri from Bombay, Swamiji writes, 'His (Ramdas') father intends going to Chicago on 31st (May 1893); if so we could go together for company.'

In his letter dated 20 August 1893 to Alasinga Perumal from Metcalf, Massachusetts, Swamiji writes, 'Mr Lalubhai was with me up to Boston. He was very kind to me.'¹⁷ In the same letter he continues, 'Ramdas's father has gone to England. He is in a hurry to go home. He is a very good man at heart, only Baniya roughness on the surface.'¹⁸

In his letter of 6 October 1893 written from Bombay to Sri Jagmohanlalji, Dewan of Khetri, Akshay Kumar Ghosh says, 'In continuation of my last letter I am glad to enlighten you on various news about Swamiji. Just now I returned from Mr Chabildas, where I went in the morning to get exhaustive information about him. Mr Chabildas was always with his holiness until he separated at Boston in America.' The letter continues:

On separating, Mr Chabildas enquired what actual sum Swamiji had with him, when it was ascertained that Swamiji had only £100 with him, which in Mr Chabildas' idea is too paltry a sum to live upon in Chicago for a period longer than three or four days, as the country is five times as much dear as England. Swamiji entertains the idea, if possible, of coming in Europe and spend

a longer period in the continent, say about a year. But at Boston Mr Chabildas requested him to telegraph his London firm whenever he wanted any pecuniary help, and has on his way back himself advised his London agent to respond to him. From New York Mr Chabildas wired Swamiji twice but was given no reply. Then again from London Gurujī was asked if he was willing to join him to come back to India. The reply that was received was this, 'Don't wait, will go back a long period hence.'¹⁹

In his letters to his friends and disciples, Swamiji spurred them on to engage in some kind of business, like selling Indian goods in the United States, rather than cajole their white masters to give them jobs. The story of Chabildas Lalubhai's success, his rise from rags to riches by doing business very much agreed with Swamiji's thinking. Swamiji appreciated his enterprising nature.

Chabildas passed away in Bombay on 5 December 1914, at the age of seventy-seven. *

Thanks

1. To the descendants of Chabildas Lalubhai: (a) Smt Gamavati Seth, daughter of Sri Janmeyjay Chabildas and his first wife; (b) Smt Hansaben Goragandhi, daughter of Sri Janmeyjay Chabildas and his second wife. She gave us Chabildas Lalubhai's photograph; (c) Sri Suryakant Seth, son of Smt Gamavati Seth, who identified Chabildas Lalubhai's Napeon Sea Road bungalow; (e) Sri Harishbhai Khot, son of Sri Bhadrassen Chabildas. He was the second descendant who identified Chabildas Lalubhai's bungalow on Napeon Sea Road and gave us a copy of the sale deed of the said bungalow and also its photograph.
2. To the late Sri Mahendra Seth, son of Smt Gamavati Seth. He helped us by getting most of

the newspaper references and the will of Chabildas Lalubhai.

3. To (a) Sri H L Ganjawala, corporate architect and chartered engineer, for acquiring the layout plan of the Napeon Sea Road bungalow; and (b) Sri Manesh Ganjawala, architect and interior designer, for taking pictures of the bungalow.

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Notes and References

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3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.13.
4. In 1973, the author's mother, Smt Lilavati, and Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, had gone to Mansen Kursandas' house to find out the letters of Swamiji written to Ramdas Chabildas and his father Chabildas Lalubhai, but they could not find any. Mansen was Ramdas Chabildas' nephew and lived in Tin Batti, Walkheshwar, Bombay.
5. *History of Arya Samaj* (Hindi), 1982, 1.262-4.
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9. Reported by Mulchand Verma in *Mumbai Samachar*, 14 May 1991.
10. The author gathered this information in August 2003 from Smt Motabai Baxi, who is now ninety-five years old.
11. *Upanagar Dhvani*.
12. Heard from Smt Hansaben Goragandhi.
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15. *Life*, 1.304.
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Why should the phrase 'It's none of my business' be always followed by 'but'?

Implications of the First Three Meetings between Sri Ramakrishna and M

DR C S SHAH

First Meeting

Spiritual history is full of episodes where seekers after Truth came in contact with the knower of Truth by chance, coincidence or in strange circumstances. The ways of spiritual encounter between a teacher (guru) and a disciple (sadhaka) are of immense significance to spiritual aspirants. We shall study three such meetings in the life of Mahendranath Gupta, commonly known as M, Mani or Master Mahashay. His first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna was in February 1882.

Master and Disciple

Having scaled the summit of spiritual experience through all paths, Sri Ramakrishna was living the last few years of his life in the Dakshineswar temple complex, waiting for his chosen disciples to arrive. Many seekers after Truth, devotees, curious people and lay persons visited this temple. A few of them came to Sri Ramakrishna to seek solutions to their spiritual problems. In his simple and lucid language, from his first-hand knowledge of every aspect of spirituality, Sri Ramakrishna satisfied the visitors with his answers, illustrating spiritual truths with parables and anecdotes, or by singing songs that contained solace and solutions for their troubles. We are fortunate that M chronicled these sayings, teachings, parables and anecdotes in the form of his monumental work, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. But for such reliable documentation, sincere aspirants would have remained oblivious to the subtleties and nuances of spiritual truths and God-realization.

Mahendranath Gupta was an educated

young man and headmaster of a school run by the great Bengali philanthropist Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. Liberal and progressive in outlook, M was equally well oriented in the religious trends of his time. He was an active member of the Brahmo Samaj of Keshab Chandra Sen. He had studied Hindu philosophy to some extent and was perhaps destined to lead a spiritual life. His married life was somewhat disturbed, so he had led a frustrated and stressful life. Occasionally, even thoughts of suicide arose in his mind.

With such a frame of mind, M reached Dakshineswar with his friend Sidhu. It was the pleasant spring season. The Kali temple had its own majestic beauty and impression; many devotees preferred to stroll along the temple garden after offering worship to Ma Kali. The sacred Ganges flowed alongside the temple complex. There were beautiful gardens around the temple, which attracted visitors intending to spend time enjoying the beautiful trees and flowers.

Sidhu stayed in a locality nearby, and knew that a paramahansa lived at Dakshineswar. Of course, he was referring to Sri Ramakrishna. On that particular day he said to M, 'There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges where a paramahansa lives. Should you like to go there?'¹ M consented and they reached the temple garden. They went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. M describes the first encounter thus: 'There they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the

floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.’ (77)

Clouds of dejection vanished from M’s life under the illumining light of Sri Ramakrishna’s words. That marked a new phase in M’s life. He regained his self-confidence, gradually underwent spiritual transformation under the Master’s loving care and grew to write the *Gospel*, a work that has been translated into many languages all over the world and has been a solace to many. Indeed, the *Gospel* has permanently engraved his name in the history of Ramakrishna movement.

What were the factors that changed a depressed M into a self-confident, wise man? We get some glimpses of one important factor in their first meeting. Despite so many attractions—the temples, the garden and the Ganges—M went straight to Sri Ramakrishna’s room. This shows his intention to seek spiritual instruction directly from the person whom his friend had described as a paramahansa. M was wise enough to discriminate between things of primary and secondary importance. Rather, M knew his priorities well. The lesson a spiritual aspirant can learn from this apparently insignificant act is this: he should be sincere and one-pointed in his search; rather than getting attracted by secondary details, he should try to seek the truth from the main source.

Words of Nectar

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the devotees seated in front of him:

When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such rituals as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away by themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om. (77)

Continuing, he said, ‘The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om.’ (77)

M was highly impressed as he listened to those words of deep spiritual import. He stood speechless and looked on. It was as if he was listening to Shukadeva, the great rishi of ancient India, son of the famous seer Veda Vyasa, and who narrated the *Bhagavata* to King Parikshit; or as if Sri Chaitanya Deva was singing the name and glories of the Lord with his devotees. M felt the purity and sacredness of the place; spirituality was pervading the entire atmosphere. He felt an irresistible desire to stay there listening to the words of the most charming man he had ever seen.

Then M decided to go round and get familiar with the surroundings. He heard the sweet music of evening worship arising from the direction of the Kali temple. The gong, the bells, the cymbals, the drums, all added to the spiritual mood. The evening prayer was on. ‘The sounds travelled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship.’ (77-8)

Sidhu told his friend about the history of the Kali temple and how at a very high cost Rani Rasmani had built the temple in 1855. Later M came to know how Sri Ramakrishna was involved as a priest and how he brought Ma Kali’s stone image to life! Soon both Sidhu and M were back at Sri Ramakrishna’s room. This time the door was closed but not locked. As an act of etiquette, M asked the maid, Brinde, if it would be all right for them to see the paramahansa. Would she be kind enough to announce their arrival? M was also curious to know whether Sri Ramakrishna read many books and asked Brinde about it.

M Meets the Master

The maid replied, ‘Books? Oh, dear no! They’re all on his tongue. ... Go right in, children. Go in and sit down.’ (78) M was amazed to hear that Sri Ramakrishna did not read any

books. Then how could he talk of such great truths! Soon the two friends entered the room and found Sri Ramakrishna deeply absorbed within himself, as if unaware of any outside happenings. With folded hands M saluted the Master. The Master made a few preliminary inquiries about M: where he stayed, where he worked and so on. It was found that even during such a short period of time Sri Ramakrishna was seen to get lost in the thought of God. He was in a peculiar mood which M knew nothing about. In a subsequent (third) meeting, M would observe Sri Ramakrishna in the state of samadhi, the state of absorption in divine Consciousness.

Unable to find a topic to pursue the talks further, M simply said, 'Perhaps you want to perform your evening worship. In that case, may we take our leave?' Still in his high spiritual mood, Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'No, it is not exactly like that.' After a little conversation

M once again saluted the saint and left the room. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Come again.' (78)

We all know how subsequently M continued his visits to the Master and became one of his most devoted disciples; how the guru explained to the sadhaka the intricacies of spiritual life. It is no wonder that his depression and suicidal tendency became things of the past. When one drinks nectar it destroys all ideas of defect and deficiency. The guru had found a true disciple and the disciple a true guru. Such rare occurrences tell us about the Indian spiritual tradition. A sincere and yearning seeker after Truth, after groping in the darkness of ignorance for long, suddenly comes in contact with Light and the spark of spirituality kindles in his heart. The magnet attracts the iron filings. The spiritual current unleashed by a man of God endures for decades, and illumines many sadhakas in the process.

Second Meeting

M did not wait for long for his second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. The next day he visited him at 8 am. We analyse the implications and importance of this second meeting.

Image Worship

After some initial enquiries, Sri Ramakrishna asked M, 'Well, how is Keshab now? He was very ill.' M was an English-educated teacher. This fact might have led Sri Ramakrishna to conclude that M must have been associated with the Brahmo Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna was quick to guess the prevailing tendencies in the youth of his time to join the Brahmo Samaj and participate in its methods of worship. This Brahmo movement had caught the imagination of many young college students and intellectuals by propagating revisionist trends in orthodox Hindu religion. The Brahmo Samaj believed in novel and progressive concepts like worship of God with attributes

but without form (*saguṇa nirākāra bhāva*). Brahmos were wary of worship of God with form (*sākāra upāsana*), through metal, clay or stone images.

It is in this context that Sri Ramakrishna's conversation with M assumes importance. The enquiry about Keshab's health outwardly appears a routine matter, but one should remember that Sri Ramakrishna was meeting M only for the second time, and apparently did not know much about his faith. Without breaking the thread of conversation, Sri Ramakrishna volunteered, 'I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery. ... I would ... cry before her: "Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn't live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta?" And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.' (79)

These talks give us some insight into Sri Ramakrishna's thinking. It was natural for

him to say what he believed; there was never an iota of hypocrisy in his speech, nor any deliberate attempt to teach others. He always meant what he spoke and spoke what he knew. For him every form of worship was true, for, according to him, to remember and worship God with form or without form was but a step towards true religiosity. His catholicity, broadness of vision and knowledge had made him aware of the necessity of the crudest as well as the most refined form of worship and spiritual discipline, depending upon the nature and aptitude of the sadhaka. Nay, for Sri Ramakrishna every human being was a sadhaka in his own right, albeit some were not conscious of this fact.

As a logical conclusion to such thoughts, Sri Ramakrishna asked M: 'Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?' (80) In this question we see the link with the Master's previous statement (that he had offered coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for Keshab's recovery). It was as if Sri Ramakrishna knew beforehand the tendency of young people to try to show off their superiority in worshipping God without form and to look down upon the worship of God with form.

Now M got puzzled: can both *sākāra* and *nirākāra* be true? The ring of truthfulness in the words of Sri Ramakrishna had by now dawned upon M, forcing him to contemplate thus. However, without appearing defeated or confused, M said, 'Sir, I like to think of God as formless.' (80)

Sri Ramakrishna responded by displaying satisfaction and told him that it was all right to think of God either way. Moreover, he suggested to M to stick to his belief; for any kind of belief in God is worthy of respect, never to be despised. Sri Ramakrishna thus advised M to cling to his faith, but not to think that others who did not hold similar views were wrong. For Sri Ramakrishna all the rituals and kinds of worship prevalent in Hindu life were true. This point particularly helps us

even today to tread on our path to God without causing hurt to others, or creating discordant notes in their hearts, or tearing the social fabric. The seed of the harmony of religions seems to be sown here, as one needs to make a beginning by accepting all Hindu religious sects as equally true paths leading towards God.

Nonetheless, it was not easy for M to accept this truth easily. As is our wont, M too entered into arguments with Sri Ramakrishna, saying, 'Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!' And even though Sri Ramakrishna interrupted by saying, 'But why clay? It is an image of Spirit', M continued with his argument: 'But, sir, one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is *not* God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.' (80)

Weary of people who despised image worship, Sri Ramakrishna sharply reacted against people trying to teach others without first acquiring knowledge themselves. This is a natural tendency among the educated. They think that by their knowledge of science and arts they have automatically become conversant with spiritual knowledge as well. They take 'rightful' pride in teaching others about religion. However, sooner than later a sincere aspirant realizes that religion, spirituality or the science of knowledge of God is something totally different from empirical knowledge.

By way of simple examples Sri Ramakrishna explained to M that all forms of worship are valid, and necessary. It is God who Himself has arranged for every form of worship to suit different men in different stages of knowledge. For instance, 'The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it—pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on—to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.' (81)

What Is Knowledge?

People remain ignorant of the science of spirituality despite being educated otherwise. In learning the science of spirituality, one has to start from the basic premise that the study of religion is totally different from physical sciences and arts. Ignorance of this fact leads to inflated egos and claims to religion by learned professors, influential leaders and wealthy aristocrats on the basis of their privileges.

In this connection it is pertinent to refer to the initial discussion between Sri Ramakrishna and M. After inquiring about his marital status, Sri Ramakrishna put a very unusual question to M: 'Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidya?' Not

realizing the implication of this question, M replied, 'She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant (for she was illiterate).'

Not pleased with this reply, Sri Ramakrishna reproached M: 'And you are a man of knowledge!' (79-80) We do not easily understand the spiritual implication of *knowledge* and *ignorance*. By knowledge Sri Ramakrishna meant here the Knowledge of God. To realize or to experience divine Consciousness is true knowledge; all else is ignorance. As Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavadgita*, 'Constancy in Self-knowledge and an insight into the object of true Knowledge, that is, God—this is declared to be knowledge; what is contrary to this is called ignorance.'²

Third Meeting

Enquiry Regarding the Method

We saw how with the help of simple language and analogies Sri Ramakrishna made M aware of his superficial knowledge about God, spirituality and religion. M vowed never to argue with the Master from then on. Instead, he now enquired about the ways and means for the realization of God. He asked four questions to Sri Ramakrishna: (1) How may we fix our mind on God? (2) How should we live in the world? (3) Is it possible to see God? (4) Under what conditions does one see God?

From here start the wonderful and illuminating lessons for householder devotees: how to lead a spiritual life while living in the world. In response, initially, Sri Ramakrishna taught four basic things, punctuating them with simple analogies, parables and anecdotes. He never tired of repeating these teachings: (1) Repeat God's name and sing His glories. (2) Associate with holy men and visit God's devotees now and then. (3) Contemplate and meditate on God in solitude. (4) Practise discrimination and dispassion, and develop love for God.

Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the need for holy company. Who is holy? He is holy in whose association one becomes tranquil and develops the desire to seek God. Our mind is influenced by our surroundings. Tamasic company leads to infatuation and lethargy; rajasic company to activity, passion and ambition; while sattvic company instils purity and yearning for God.

M's second question to Sri Ramakrishna was, 'How should we live in the world?' And the compassionate Master told him to live in the world even as a maidservant lives in the house of a rich man. She performs all her duties. She cares for the rich man's children, cooks for his family, but is not attached to any of them. She knows for sure that nothing in her master's house belongs to her. The things she uses, the children she dresses up, the food she cooks and all the small and sundry work she does—she does it all without any claim on any of them. If she quits her job for any reason, she is not allowed to take anything from that house. And second, while she does all the work of her master, her attention is always focused on her small hut far away, where she

would retire after her daily chores; and only that hut she will be able to call her own.

By this example Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the need to cultivate non-attachment and to have a focused vision on one's goal in life. This whole world can be compared to the rich man's house where we 'maidservants' work. Nothing belongs to us here. Our only claim is to the work—the work we have chosen or the one that has fallen to our lot. If we get attached to it, that would be invitation to grief. Again, it would make us unhappy at the time of death, since at that time we will be forced to leave behind everything of this world. This world is always full of both sorrow and joy. Unmixed joy or sorrow is a delusion. The best policy, then, is to work without attachment; love and hate (*rāga* and *dveṣa*) are both attachments. Only detachment can help us free ourselves from sorrow. To constantly focus our attention on our 'far-off hut' implies constantly thinking of God. He is our true abode, our true resting place and our goal. None can dislodge us from God, nor can anything hurt us. God is our first and last resort, our only refuge.

In the early stages, thanks to its fickle nature, the mind does not easily dwell on God. And there are many extraneous forces always ready to sway the mind and make it restless. Sri Ramakrishna taught that we should hedge ourselves with the divine name to be free from worldliness even as we hedge a tender plant to protect it from cattle.

He further advocated retirement into solitude now and then: one should retire to a forest or an ashrama, and if this is not possible, try to meditate in the corner of a room or in the privacy and silence of the mind itself.

Similarly, singing the glories of the Lord and repetition of His name keep the mind focused on God. As a bonus, the company of like-minded people in such devotional groups greatly helps in overcoming despondency and fear.

Moreover, in the silence of solitude one finds favourable conditions to discriminate

between the real and the unreal, the permanent and the ephemeral. Sri Ramakrishna told M, "'Woman and gold' is impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling place—nothing more. You cannot realize God with its help. Therefore money can never be the goal of life. That is the process of discrimination."³

In the absence of this divine love we get more and more entangled in worldly affairs. The consequent problems of life, grief and suffering rob us of our peace of mind, making it difficult to think of anything higher. Sri Ramakrishna used simple but effective analogies to underline the importance of cultivating love of God. He taught that just as a person rubs his hands with oil before breaking open a jack-fruit so that they do not get smeared with its sticky milk, even so one must 'first secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world'. (82)

Another striking analogy of his relates to solitude. One allows the milk to set into curd before churning out butter from it. Now this butter can be kept in water, on which it would float; there is no fear of its getting mixed with water like milk. In the same way the devotee of God needs to live in solitude for some time and cultivate divine love and detachment.

All these practices are vital for developing purity of mind, love of God, discrimination and dispassion. Underlining the importance of intense yearning for God, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife.' (83)

Conclusion

Thus we see Sri Ramakrishna's utmost simplicity in elucidating profound principles of religion and spirituality. If we are sincere and our goal of life is God-realization, as Sri

Ramakrishna maintains it should be, these teachings should certainly inspire us. His teachings are useful not only for those aspirants who have intense desire and yearning to advance towards this goal, but also for a lay person; for knowingly or unknowingly every person is a seeker after Truth. If we can surrender to the will of God and call on Him prayerfully, He will come to help us, even as the mother cat comes to her kittens when they cry ‘mew, mew’.

We learn some important lessons from these first few meetings between M and Sri Ramakrishna.

(1) Sri Ramakrishna put forward newer truths of Vedanta that had remained hidden obscure so far. He reconciled the quarrelling Vedantic sects by going beyond all the rigid positions held by their proponents. One of my friends in the US who was a professor of comparative religion, had in fact asked me, ‘Does Sri Ramakrishna preach the Qualified Monism of Ramanuja or the Monism of Shankara?’

I am unable to comment with any authority, but I feel Sri Ramakrishna goes beyond both of these great saint-scholars. With the confidence and ease of a knower of God, he could speak of the Personal-Impersonal essence of Reality. In his unique state of *bhava-mukha*, he had traversed the domain of both Brahman and Shakti, both nitya and lila: the ‘fire and its power to burn’, the ‘milk and its whiteness’, and the ‘coiled snake and the snake in motion’.

(2) To experience these spiritual truths the best approach in today’s world of intellectual progress is to combine jnana (discrimination and dispassion), yoga (meditation) and bhakti (love of God). This point of special importance was picked up by his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda, when he advised us

to draw energy from all the forces at our disposal: Realize God, he said, ‘either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free’.⁴

(3) Religion is realization of our divine nature. Getting established in spiritual Consciousness is the goal of human birth. M learnt that such divine moods, or *bhāvas*, were common in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Even a brief mention or minor suggestion of God brought about such changes in Sri Ramakrishna’s consciousness. In his third meeting with the Master, in the presence of Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda), M saw the Master now singing and dancing and now going into the highest state of *samadhi*. M was overwhelmed with what he saw. These episodes of altered states of consciousness, comprising visions, *bhāva* and *samadhi*, formed the basis of religion in Sri Ramakrishna’s life. Such experiences of higher Consciousness brought the knowledge of Divinity to this mortal world. That is why anyone who came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna was impressed by his capacity to reveal spiritual truths. To seek holy company, to meditate on higher Consciousness in solitude, to discriminate between the Real and the unreal, to have dispassion towards worldly life (particularly regarding ‘lust and greed’) and to lead a simple and moral life—these, the Master taught, are the means to realize God. *

References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 77.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.11.
3. *Gospel*, 82.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.124.

By taking refuge in Sri Ramakrishna you have received a new light. Mould your life in his cast and let people see your exemplary lives.

—Swami Premananda



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Positive Psychotherapy. Nossrat Peseschkian. New Dawn, L-10 Green Park Extension, New Delhi 110 016. E-mail: ghai@nde.vsnl.net.in. 2000. xviii + 442 pp. Rs 250.

At last a real book on mental health that does not deride the human spirit of being seedy and base. It acknowledges that mental illnesses are present in man and also acknowledges his capacity to eradicate them. The subtitle of the book is 'Theory and Practice of a New Method'. Neurology, psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy; psychoanalysts, practising psychologists, behaviour therapists, child psychologists—all claim to contain the complex human mind within their own disciplines. A personality is complex, and when something goes wrong the complexity increases. Though the above-mentioned disciplines overlap, they have tailored themselves to look for only simple answers and straitjacket the problem instead of liberating the human mind. This book takes a refreshing view and is a translation from the original German.

The new trend in mental-health disciplines is to look beyond the set paradigms and take a holistic view of a person and his interactions in various social settings. The author really dares to look beyond and shows that folk psychotherapy, juridical therapy, economic therapy, astrological therapy, medical therapy, scientific therapy and so on have their place and influence on the individual soul. Nossrat Peseschkian also concedes that cultural and family factors are now more important than earlier.

Nossrat Peseschkian was born an Iranian and is working in the West. The importance of cultural factors in mental illnesses had come early to his trained attention while dealing with patients. He is a specialist in psychiatry and neurology and has received his training in Switzerland and the United States. In *Positive Psychotherapy* he has illustrated theories and actual situations by using ancient oriental wisdom in the form of short stories. The excellent preface by Prof Shridar Sharma admirably clears the way for the author.

The author's 'new method' is called 'differentiation analysis'. He has been working on it from 1968. 'While in the psychotherapeutic and pedagogic literature it is customary to take into account only functional and dynamic connections, differentiation analysis goes systematically and critically into the contents of upbringing and interpersonal conflicts. It looks at the actual capacities in an individual and their expressions in family and professional life. (47) Actual capacities are further divided into primary and secondary. This 'new method' is nothing but what Vedanta calls *viveka*, or discrimination. It is a human capacity that takes shape not only physically but also psychologically and socially. Thus the author takes the reader down the length of his theory, which he says is the result of years of observation and practice by him and many others in Wiesbaden, Germany. It has the usual case histories that any book on psychotherapy abounds in. The book touches upon old theories in passing but lucidly explains the new approach so that the reader can relate to it easily and begin to solve his problems.

This book must find its place not only with professionals and teachers but also with aspiring professionals and patients. It is also recommended to anybody interested in maintaining mental health.

*Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata*

Karma and Reincarnation; Science, Consciousness and Swami Vivekananda (2 VCDs). *Concept and design by Swami Medhananda; voice by Swami Atmashraddhananda.* Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Yadavagiri, Mysore 570 020. E-mail: vivekaprabha@eth.net. Rs 75 each.

The theory of karma and rebirth, the divinity of man and the unity and solidarity of existence are the three pillars of Vedanta philosophy. These two VCDs venture to present these truths in the light

of modern thought.

1. Karma and Reincarnation: This VCD deals with the theory of karma and rebirth. It specially invites the attention of those eager to unravel the mystery of life and death, which finds its first faint rumblings in the question 'Is death the end of all or do we survive it?' Rebirth is an accepted theory in the East, but is still intriguing for many in the West. This video convincingly enlightens the viewers about the fact of rebirth by inferential, scientific and historical evidences. Swami Vivekananda's powerful arguments, the discussions on the DNA factor, the conclusions of psychiatry and psychology, the phenomenon of regression, the famous Bridey Murphy case, the Dead Sea Scroll evidences—are all enough stimulants to provoke the viewer, even if sceptical, to introspection. If a believer, he is sure to confidently march ahead on the right path towards the goal of perfection. Beginning with Swamiji's role in conveying these ideas to the West, this 33-minute video briefly evaluates this important theory in the historical background of Christianity. With its masterly script and graphics, it also briefly and charmingly captures some timeless Vedantic truths for the modern world.

Man shapes his own destiny in the light of karma and reincarnation. Every action of his then becomes an opportunity to unleash more of his hidden divine potential and prepares him for the climactic experience of the unlimited Consciousness, which forms the subject matter of the other VCD.

2. Science, Consciousness and Swami Vivekananda: This VCD presents the Vedantic truth of Consciousness vis-à-vis science and Swamiji's thoughts. Though targeted at seekers of knowledge in general, the VCD is of particular interest to students of Vedanta, science and Swamiji—severally or jointly. It enlightens us about mukti, the ultimate goal of all human pursuits, attained by the knowledge of the supreme Truth. According to Vedanta, Consciousness is that ultimate Truth, and it finds the highest expression in man's pure self-awareness as 'I'.

On the one side, science completely missed until recently this datum from its investigations, and, on the other, it stands today on the frontiers of matter, questioning its very existence. With all its boasted, intellect-based ingenuity, its ignorance of its future course is evident from its incapacity to fill in the blank. Vedanta steps in to do that task, as Swamiji foresaw long back. In this modern period, he was the first to unify these two streams of knowl-

edge, one fulfilling the other.

Proposing this truth, the video proceeds to show how Consciousness manifests in the universe through an evolutionary process, a concept so dear to modern astrophysicists and biologists, in whose evolutionary theory Consciousness played second fiddle to matter, or rather, none at all. The Big Bang, evolution at the cosmic, organic and human stages, relativity theory, quantum physics—the video briefly broaches these topics in the light of Consciousness and Swamiji's revealing, although startling, thoughts. With catchy animation, simple and yet enlightening script, and charming narration, this 24-minute video admirably presents a profound and highly technical subject.

Both these VCDs are highly recommended for all seekers of knowledge, and a must for students. They can be played on both PCs and VCD players.

Swami Shuddhidananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Encyclopaedia of Vedānta. Prof Ram Murti Sharma. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2002. xi + 224 pp. Rs 295.

What is under review is the second edition of the book. The main body of the work is divided into three parts. The first part deals with some of the important Vedantic terms. The second part, entitled 'Prominent Western Scholars Who Have Contributed to the Vedantic Studies', is really an admirable effort at giving an idea of the extensive services rendered by numerous Western Sanskritists, Indologists and philosophers to the study and propagation Vedanta during the last two centuries. The third part, which is a much less remarkable effort, consists of brief descriptions of some Indian scholars and philosophers of Vedanta. The volume carries two appendices, the first dealing with the present Shankaracharyas of the four Maths (here, for some mysterious reason, the author lists five Maths, including the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, which, according to traditional sources, was not founded by Adi Shankaracharya).

The work affords interesting reading and occasionally reveals the imprint of sound scholarship. Every teacher or student of Vedanta who peruses this book will find it extremely informative. But

there are certain unpleasant features which are too glaring to be ignored by discerning students.

A striking drawback of the work is the disproportionate allocation of space to the various headings. A more glaring example cannot be pointed out than the section devoted to Adi Shankaracharya. There is not even a brief description of his life, important works, main contributions to Advaita philosophy or his famous refutations of the other schools of philosophy like the Buddhist Shunyavada, the Mimamsa or the Sankhya. More than that, here is what the author has to say in his half-page entry under the title 'Shankaracharya': 'Although he is known as the Advaitin, his main contribution is found in his doctrine of Maya.' (113) Prof Sharma is not alone in calling Adi Shankara just a *māyāvādin*. There are writers and scholars who consider Vallabha as a *brahmavādin* and Shankara as a *māyāvādin*!

Any primary student of Indian philosophy ought to know that Adi Shankaracharya was the consolidator of Advaita philosophy. It was he who established, through his commentaries on the triple foundations, the Upanishads, *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavadgita*, that Advaita is the ultimate synthesis of thought underlying the different schools of Indian philosophy. To establish his Advaita view he had to show that everything except Brahman is an appearance. So it is maya, the power of the Lord from which the world springs, 'the divine power in which names and forms lie involved and which we assume to be antecedent condition of that state of the world in which names and forms are evolved; *daivī śaktiḥ avyākṛtanāmarūpā nāmarūpayoḥ prāgavas-thā*'. (Shankara's commentary on *Brahma Sutras*, 1.4.9) In short, Shankara should primarily be considered the greatest exponent and consolidator of Advaita philosophy, of which *māyāvāda* was an important aspect. In other words, it is best to refrain from the description of Shankara's Advaita as *māyāvāda*. Rather it should be termed *advaitavāda* or *brahmavāda*.

Since the volume is called *Encyclopaedia of Vedānta* one would also expect descriptions of at least some of the most important technical terms pertaining to the other two schools of Vedānta: Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita and Madhva's Dvaita. But a student of comparative philosophy who wants to use this book for such a reference will be totally disappointed. The author seems to have confined his interest to the Advaita viewpoint of Shankarachar-

ya. Even within this limit, it is very doubtful if he has done full justice. Of the three important theories pertaining to the relation between Brahman and jiva the author has mentioned only the *avacchedavāda* of Vachaspati Mishra and the *ābhāsavāda* of Sureshvaracharya, omitting the equally important *pratibimbavāda* of the Vivarana school propounded by Prakashatman, Sarvajnatman and others.

More importance could have been attached to explaining the important technical terms and words used in Vedānta philosophy. As it is, only about half the book (1-118) is devoted to this purpose. The result is easy to imagine. To take but one instance, *upakrama* is explained as 'beginning, commencement', followed by a small quotation from the *Vedāntasara* (15). The author should also have given here the more fundamental Mimamsa view of *upakrama* as used in the *Tātparyanirnaya*, which, in a general sense, is accepted by Vedāntins as well.

The work would have been comprehensive and technically more meaningful had the author been economical with his narration of the history of the Maths in his appendices that, by any standard, is far out of proportion to the size of the whole work.

And finally, an encyclopaedia is not about giving details about some prominent individuals in appendices; it is about helping a student in the understanding the basics of important topics related to the central theme. Judging by this yardstick, it can only be said that Prof Sharma's work is a reminder of the need of better works along these lines.

With slightly more moderation and a sense of balance in the selection of entries, distribution of space and descriptions of sub-topics, and with a keen eye for accuracy of certain plain facts, the author could have considerably enhanced the usefulness of the work. A mind-boggling case in point is the inclusion of a fifth 'Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha' under Appendix I, titled 'The Present Sankaracharyas of the Four Maths', ('Contents' and 220) with a disproportionately elaborate description.

Prof Ram Murti Sharma has detailed a long list of his publications, the number of works he has edited, besides giving an elaborate description of his various academic achievements—all running into no less than four pages (incidentally, one of the longest entries in the whole book!), and which forms an important part of the section 'Some Indian Scholars and Philosophers of Vedānta'. And this in contrast to the less than half a page devoted to Adi

Shankara and about half a page to Swami Vivekananda!

Such glaring defects notwithstanding, Prof Sharma's work serves an important purpose: it could make many enterprising scholars of our times aware of the need of a really serious and comprehensive encyclopaedia of Vedanta. As Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma writes in his brief, but admirable foreword, the preparation of an encyclopaedia of Vedanta is an extremely challenging task.

Swami Tattwamayana
Editor, Prabuddha Keralam
Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thrissur

Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion. John W Shroeder. University of Hawaii Press, 2840 Kolowalu Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822-1888. 2001. xx + 176 pp. \$ 19.

The advent of Buddhism is an epoch in spiritual history. India, where Buddhism was born, supplied its spiritual ideas to many countries in the East and the Far East.

This book is an in-depth analysis of the Buddhist notion of *upaya*, meaning 'skillful means'. The concept has a significant place in Buddhism, specially the Mahayana tradition. This monograph presents the theme from the philosophical and religious angles, beginning with Buddha's vision in the *Mahavagga*, and the development of the theme in the Mahayana sutras, and Ch'an and Pure Land traditions. The author has quoted from the writings of a number of scholars, mostly Western, and argues how Buddha's teachings were in the spirit of 'skillful means'; Buddha gave a method, not a creed, nor doctrines. Buddha exhorted his disciples to follow the 'middle path' he showed and attain nirvana themselves.

Buddha was aware of the need to be 'sensitive to the *karmic* differences of human beings', and out of compassion, adapted his lessons to the level of understanding of the audience. Expediency therefore dictates that instead of a uniform code, a blend of 'wisdom' and 'compassion' is necessary to effectively communicate dharma. The author explores 'this link between wisdom and compassion, called skill-in-means (*upaya-kaushalya*) in the Mahayana tradition'.

Buddha's teachings are not to be mistaken for any inconsistency, as 'wisdom is not bound by any

single doctrine, practice or metaphysical view.' *Upaya* is not concerned with metaphysical issues. 'Skillful means,' says the author, 'will counteract this "metaphysical" approach by arguing that the major debates in Buddhism surround issues of praxis and the problem of justifying a fixed practice for all people.' The author concludes with the advice given by Vimalakirti to Purna, a disciple of Buddha, that 'those who do not know the thoughts or inclinations of others, are not able to teach the Dharma to anyone'.

The subject has been presented in five chapters. The first, 'The Buddha's Skill-in-Means' is a historical review which develops the idea that his teachings are primarily religious tools or devices rather than metaphysical truths. The second chapter on 'Abhidharma Buddhism' is devoted to the theories of the principal Abhidharma schools and the debate in the post-Buddha period resulting in schisms. In the third chapter, 'Mahayana Buddhism', the subject has been extensively discussed in the light of the Vimalakirti's *nirdeśha*. The role of Nagarjuna, a powerful exponent of the Mahayana 'Middle Way' tradition occupies the next chapter. The fifth is devoted to the role of *upaya* in the Ch'an and Pure Land traditions.

A generous application of *upaya* techniques resulted in some unethical practices and deviations from the moral code of conduct. The differences between the main sects in interpreting Buddha's message are not merely on the surface but go deeper. The concept of 'dependent origination', Buddha's 'noble silence' (fourteen unanswered questions), *shunyata* and the differences between Abhidharma and Mahayana schools, are among the topics which have material for debate.

The author must be complimented for his deep study of the doctrine of *upaya*. Some confusion seems to prevail over the question of Hinduism versus Buddhism, specially, Atman and non-Atman (*anatman*). He observes, 'Buddha proposed the *skandhas* against the Hindu view of eternal self.' Then, Buddha's advice to two brahmins sound 'more Hindu than Buddhist' and 'he seems to contradict the doctrine of non-self (*anatman*), which many scholars see as the Buddha's real philosophical position.' The author, however, explains: 'When the Buddha changes his "view" he is simply responding to the unique *karmic* formations of human beings.'

In this context, one may refer to Swami Ranga-

nathanandaji's *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*. He quotes Rhys Davids (a scholar relied upon by Shroeder) and holds that Gautama was no enemy of Hinduism; he was 'born and brought up and lived and died a typical Indian. ... And he had but little quarrel with the religion that did prevail.' Another scholar, Edmund Holmes, has been quoted thus: 'Buddha accepted the idealistic teachings of the Upanishads—accepted it at its highest level and in its purest form.' Regarding Buddha's experience of illumination, the revered swamiji observes, 'This question has been left unanswered by Buddha. It has not been answered by his immediate disciples either. ... and this silence regarding the nature of the unconditioned, impersonal state and its description in negative terms or even through silence is perfectly Vedantic.' Again, 'With regard to the ultimate Reality realized in *nirvana*, Buddha did not say that it also is impermanent and insubstantial. He did not say anything about it at all.' Sri Ramakrishna held the view that Buddha's teachings were on the lines of the jnana yoga of the Upanishads. The Buddhist scriptures' criticism of the Vedas applies to the *karma kāṇḍa*, not the *jñāna kāṇḍa*. (*Eternal Values*, 146, 158, 159, 164)

This book provides valuable material for scholastic debates.

P S Sundaram
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Swami Brahmananda in Pictures. Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. E-mail: rkmblr_publi@vsnl.net. 2002. 100 pp. Rs 150.

Each of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had some definite role to fulfil in the divine mission of Sri Ramakrishna. In its infancy the Ramakrishna Order needed careful nurturing and spiritual orientation. This it got from the spiritual giant Swami Brahmanandaji when he steered the Order as its President for twenty-two long years (1901-22). He was the heir to the spiritual legacy of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said he had the keen intelligence of a king. Thus Brahmanandaji came to be known as 'Raja Maharaj' in the Ramakrishna Order. By a glance or touch or by his mere presence he could raise the minds of the devotees to a high level and change their lives.

This book is a pictorial biography of this great spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, published first as

his birth centenary souvenir in 1964, by Swami Vireswaranandaji, then General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The book remained out of print for long. Now, owing to its close association with Raja Maharaj, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, has brought out this second edition of the important book.

The book begins with a short life sketch of Brahmanandaji by Chistopher Isherwood, covering his birth, childhood and association with Sri Ramakrishna; Swami Vivekananda and other young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna; the founding of the Ramakrishna Order; a brief account of his tenure as President of the Order; how he ruled with ease, love and spiritual power; and finally, his mahasamadhi.

The photographs are arranged chronologically as far as possible with short explanatory notes for each. They are classified under four chapters, each dealing with particular periods of Raja Maharaj's life and prefaced by a short introduction. The first chapter relates to his early life and association with Sri Ramakrishna. The second deals with his life at the Baranagore monastery and his meditative life as a wandering monk. The third covers the period from his return to the monastery, meanwhile shifted to Alambazar, to the founding of Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. The last chapter deals with his life as President of the Ramakrishna Order, consolidating its expanding activities and always maintaining a proper balance between work and worship in the life of his followers; his propagation of Sri Ramakrishna's message all over India; and his spiritual ministry. There is a short glossary at the end.

The biography becomes more interesting and absorbing with the help of the photographs, printed on art paper. The photos give us an idea of how a God-man looks. One can discern an other-worldly look on Brahmanandaji's calm, serene face and have an inkling of his indrawn, abstracted moods. He looks like a real raja of the spiritual domain. The book also has photos of the other direct disciples of the Master. Those who are a little close to the Ramakrishna Order would love to see the photos of young Swamis Sankaranandaji, Vireswaranandaji, Sarvanandaji, Amriteswaranandaji and Ambikanandaji. (78) Also featured in the book are photos of some centres of the Ramakrishna Order like Bangalore, Madras, Bhubaneswar, Kankhal and Allahabad, and of pilgrimage centres like Omkarnath, Dwarkanath, Hardwar, Vrindaban, Varanasi, Tiru-

pati, Madurai, Ayodhya and Rameswaram—places sanctified by Maharaj's visit. In the epilogue there are photographs of the Ramakrishna temple and Swami Brahmananda temple at Belur Math and the hall at Balaram Mandir, Kolkata, dear to Brahmanandaji.

We are indebted to Swami Harshanandaji for bringing out this edition of the pictorial biography. It is sure to gladden the devotees of the Great Master. The quality of photographs is very good.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

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A Symphony in Architecture: Ramakrishna Temple, Belur Math. *Swami Tattwananananda*. Ramakrishna Mission Shilpa-mandira, 313 G T Road, Belur Math, Howrah, 711 202. 36 pp. Rs 75.

Sri Ramakrishna was a spiritual phenomenon. He drew the best from the past, synthesized them through his experiences and released them in a unique method for the future not only of India but also of the world. In his 'Karma Yoga' lectures, Swami Vivekananda explains this: 'Man is, as it were, a centre, and is attracting all the powers of the universe towards himself, and in this centre is fusing them all and again sending them off in a big current. Such a centre is the *real* man—the almighty, the omniscient—and he draws the whole universe towards him. ... And out of them he fashions the mighty stream of tendency called character and throws it outwards.'

Sri Ramakrishna's temple at Belur Math enshrines his sacred relics and is suffused with his spiritual presence. The temple was conceptualized by Swamiji and was later concretized by Swami Vijnanananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. During his itinerant years in India Swamiji had studied the land, the people, the history, the culture and also the various architectural styles prevalent then. Thus what we behold of the Ramakrishna temple is a blending of ancient and mediaeval styles of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and also Christian architecture. As the author says, the temple is a symphony of ideas, of traditions, of religions, of ideals, of sublimity—in stone.

Illustrated with pictures and line drawings, this is a handy booklet that shows by comparison the

architectural aspects of the Ramakrishna temple, mirroring the styles of different traditions, temples and stupas. The booklet is also interspersed with some powerful sayings of Swamiji along with his pictures. There is a helpful site plan of the temple and the adjoining area at the end.

With the spread of Sri Ramakrishna's ideas all over India and the world, the temple has become the cynosure of eyes and minds. *A Symphony in Architecture* is a brief yet helpful booklet that successfully captures the symbology, significance and symphony underlying the Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math.

PB

Life and Its Meaning. *K P Menon*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2003. xii + 52 pp. Rs 45.

From time immemorial questions like 'Who am I?' 'Does God exist?' and 'What is my relationship with God or this world?' continue to puzzle many a sincere seeker after Truth as well as lay people. There are no simple answers to these questions, because their answers depend on cultural, spiritual, religious and philosophical perceptions and biases of the society one is born in. From superstitious beliefs to advanced scientific analyses, various explanations are offered as answers to the above questions. Faith plays a significant and important role in spreading these thoughts and beliefs. Every explanation offers some satisfaction to the believer; for every concept about Self, God and Universe contains a partial truth.

In his preface to the book under review the author begins with the same theme: 'The usual questions about life and world that arise in every thinking mind have been troubling me too for many years. My struggle to solve them has led me to certain findings and conclusions.' The author wants to share his thoughts with others, and thinks 'they will be of some help to those who are searching for answers to the eternal questions'. There is a trend, a fashion, to try to relate or correlate spirituality with modern science. We try to 'analyse the spiritual problems in the light of modern science' as if to talk of spirituality without reference to modern science is not allowed, or would be a gross mistake! The author is a highly learned scientist (a graduate in mechanical engineering and associated with BARC, L&T

and Cochin Ship Yard), which explains his natural tendency to mix physical science and spirituality in this book.

This slim volume of fifty-two pages contains ten chapters or essays. The first chapter has an unusual title: 'What Am I?' instead of the more usual and expected title 'Who Am I?' The author tries to relate 'I' with a mental state that changes with external environment. In a peculiar language, he writes, '(1) Consume some alcoholic drink in small doses. At some point, depending upon the tolerance limit of the body, one will start feeling differently about oneself. The "I" gradually changes. (2) Inhale chloroform gas. "I" disappears completely. The author could have easily said, 'If one inhales chloroform gas or any other anaesthetic agent, as seen during surgical operations, it is noticed that his or her "I"-sense disappears for the time being.'

No one can object if the author wants to bring forth his own definition of the 'I'-sense or ego. But there must be an established reference point to begin with. He could have based his discussion on either modern psychology or one of the six Indian systems of philosophy (like the Sankhya), where the concept of 'I' is discussed in detail.

The discussion in the second chapter, 'Mind—An Overview', has similar limitations. With little concern about the implications of such words as 'material' and 'immaterial', the author says, 'Thus we may conclude that mind is non-material and therefore indefinable by the methods used to describe matter.' This is totally opposed to the Sankhya philosophy, which defines mind as matter. And as 'this book is an analysis of spiritual problems in the light of modern science', one expects at least a comparison of notes between spiritual and physical sciences.

The remaining essays are similarly hazy about orthodox concepts of Brahman, God and other spiritual terms. There is no objection if one were to discard God and religion and explain the world on the basis of science alone, but one expects a rational discussion and argument from the author in making his point.

Spirituality can be studied as an independent science—'science of spirituality', as Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj calls it. Then the tendency to depend on physical science for answers to questions related to God, self and the world will give way to sincere and honest study of the Upanishads

and related scriptures.

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A Challenge for Modern Minds. *Pravrajika Vivekaprana*; ed. Edith D Tipple. Sri Sarada Society, P O Box No. 38116, Albany, New York 12203. 2002. E-mail: info@srisarada.org. vii + 107 pp. \$ 10.95.

Ever since the manifested world came into being (Big Bang? Involution?), it has been undeniably engaged in a process of upward evolution. With the blossoming of the human mind on earth, different segments have been taking a variety of pathways towards the unity within, and this has resulted in a mind-boggling list of cultures. It is also obvious that all these segments are moving, however unconsciously, towards global unity. Setting aside the cynics, psychopaths and asuric power-mongers, Pravrajika Vivekaprana presents a clear philosophy of this ideal of human unity that can be reached by using the powers within us in a creative manner.

Yet, *A Challenge for Modern Minds* has nothing to do with dry concepts. The pravrajika gives precedence to 'experience' (it could be a young teacher disciplining a child, Buddha questioning his charioteer, Ramakrishna Paramahansa speaking to Kali), and this is as it should be when dealing with culture. Culture, East or West, is the product of innumerable experiences in the life of humanity gathered during all our yesterdays. As for the concept of culture, it is like the encircling chalk line drawn around a child to frighten him. He does not dare to come out of the circle and keeps weeping at this imagined imprisonment that will not allow him to walk out free.

So what is this freedom we are trying to get? Freedom from hunger, economic freedom, political independence, emancipation from ritualism—oh, there are so many! But a single instrument can help us achieve a multifaceted freedom. According to the author, a constant getting back to oneself through meditation can set us free. For we would gain discrimination, which will help us distinguish between what is real and what is unreal. But meditation is becoming increasingly impossible in day-to-day life. A meditative mood involves an ability to concentrate, an ability that is deteriorating progressively in the technological nightmare of today: 'What we have done with space and time is to make

such a multiplicity of images, a world so confused and so fast that the attention span is becoming shorter and shorter and shorter. As an example, television advertising is so very expensive that each advertiser tries to cut time to the shortest possible number of seconds or minutes necessary to convey the message. Images flash one after another. What is demanded of the viewer is to make sense out of fleeting images.' (31)

The aspirant thus finds himself in an unenviable position. What is all this puzzling play about? How to free ourselves from this unsatisfactory human condition? How to free ourselves from this constant identification with the body and mind? How to realize the Atman, to be the true 'I', and get at the ratiocinative conclusion that 'Atman is Brahman' and so 'I am Brahman'? The pravrajika says this is made possible by being aware of Brahman through a golden bridge like an *ishtadevata*: like the Heavenly Father of Jesus Christ, the Divine Mother of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. To put it in simple terms, the *nirguna* Brahman is realized through a *saguna* Form, which helps us draw our attachments away from the human condition.

Reading this book is meaningful because the learned author does not turn away anything as useless for the spiritual view. Even the mind has its vital place in this world view. Make the mind your friend! Drawing significant thoughts from the *Gita*, the pravrajika teaches us to be masters of our fate: stop the dispersal of energy, control it and move from multiplicity to the unity of Being (as Buddha and Einstein did) through concentration. Once that unity is achieved in all its totality, one attains the state reached by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, which he described as an illumination: 'Light. There was light everywhere. I was swimming in this light. I was part of it. There was no distinction between me and the surrounding universe.'

This Advaitic realization is not easily attained by all. But sincere attempts do not fail either. The author underlines the importance of icons in this search for Advaitic illumination in a Shankara-like

linkage (*satsangatve nissangatvam*): 'Einstein, Buddha and Ramakrishna concentrated all their energy in one direction and discovered the answer to their search. Seeing their success enlivens faith in us and faith leads to understanding. Understanding leads to one-pointed concentration. One-pointed concentration affords spontaneous meditation. Meditation silences the turmoil going on within. When the turmoil is over, we are illumined.' (62)

Since these chapters were talks delivered to American audiences, the learned author has used appropriate images (chiefly the personality of Jesus Christ) to help her listeners relate to the subject. She has also dealt with the vexed problem of gender in spirituality and has given a simple and clear account of the Purusha-Prakriti duality of the Supreme, and how the duality becomes the multiplicity of manifested creation. At the human level, it is true, women have been set aside as not capable of abstract thinking, and this has been 'the greatest insult possible'. Things are changing, but then, intellectual intelligence alone cannot solve human problems. Be it man or woman, we face a tremendous challenge. Are we prepared to accept it? We have to, if we seek progress.

Concludes this important publication, 'It (the challenge) asks of us no less than to reach for the next level of spiritual integrity—a level that demands less emotional reaction on our part. The task of integrating new gender roles with the old cannot be worked out subconsciously. It can only be met by tremendous use of conscious energy at the highest level.' (91)

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Book Received

Devi Māhātmyam (mūlam). Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2004. 94 pp. Rs 15.

It is surprising how many persons go through life without ever recognizing that their feelings towards other people are largely determined by their feelings towards themselves. If you're not comfortable within yourself, you can't be comfortable with others.

—Sydney J Harris